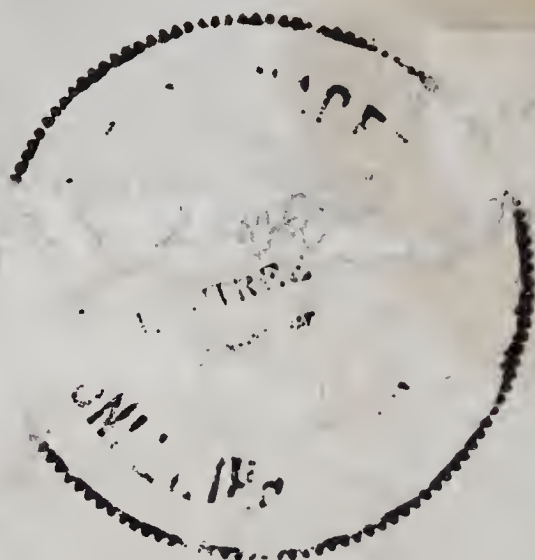


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1862

THE

HEIRESSES;

OR THE

MYSTERIES OF BRANDON ABBEY.

A TALE OF

THE OLDEN TIME.

"A tale of the times of old——"

"—— The deeds of days of other years."

OSSIAN.

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THE HEIRESS,
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MYSTERIES OF BRANDON ABBEY.



CHAPTER I.

TIME though strong is swift in flight, and year after year passes quickly by, the young, the beautiful, the brave, the noble and the rich, the prince and the peasant are alike borne down the stream of life, and pass away to that bourne from whence no traveller returns, the sun which rises in the morning, inspiring with its rays of warmth and splendour thousands of human beings; as it throws its last beams upon the world, sets upon hundreds of mourners over those who saw his rising, but whose eyes have in those few short hours been sealed in death; these reflections, have emanated from the subjects of the following tale, a tale of olden times, when the feudal Baron possessed unlimited power, and was a petty sovereign in his own right, when he ruled with a rod of iron the submissive serf, and the tenants of his lands were abject slaves, when murder stalked abroad unpunished, save when heaven itself became the avenger and hurl'd its thunderbolt at the head of the assassin; these days are past, the Baron and the Serf both moulder in their graves alike forgotten and unknown; save, where

from unusual sorrow, or crimes of dreadful note, the woes and wrongs of the one, and the villainy and misdeeds of the other, have been written and handed down to posterity, as a consolation to the afflicted and a warning to the guilty, proclaiming, that there is mercy for the bruised heart and judgment for the evil doer; such is our tale, founded on days and deeds long past, drawn from authentic sources although blended with fiction. A tale which forcibly shews the sure destruction of the vicious, and the ultimate reward of virtue. We will no longer moralize, but at once commence our interesting history.

The sun had long sunk in the west beneath a stormy sky, the wind began to howl, thunder was heard in the distance, and the rain began to descend heavily and in huge drops, as the carriage of Sir Godfrey Brandon descended a lofty hill towards the immense and gloomy forests of St. Moreton; from amidst the tall and agitated trees might be seen rising in gothic grandeur, the towers of Brandon. Impatiently leaning from the carriage window, he bade his attendants use more speed, then taking the hand of the lovely Bertha who sat by his side trembling at the storm, he kindly asked,

“Sees't thou yonder forest, dearest Bertha?”

“I do dear father” she replied “also those distant dismal looking turrets rising from its bosom,” you have before told me that our future residence was in the forests of St. Moreton, “but surely dear father that dreary pile is not destined for our future residence?”

“Alas! my poor child” exclaimed Sir Godfrey in great agitation, “We have now no other left.”

The carriage now began to enter the precincts of the gloomy forest, whose spreading branches extended in dangerous obstructions along the only road the driver was able to discover, rendering their progress slow, dangerous, and difficult. The fatigued and weary travellers, though anxious to arrive at a place of rest and security, were compelled to continue their perilous and weary way with what patience they could muster; the tract they were now in, had been untrodden by living being for many a long year, the underwood, branches, and projecting clumps of trees had become so luxuriant in their wildness, that they not only proved dangerous, but occasionally obstructed the progress of the travellers entirely; Sir Godfrey at length impatient from continual delay, again leaned from the window, and in an angry tone demanded of Oswald why he advanced no faster?

“Alas! and alack-a-day,” said Oswald “please your worship the poor beasts are worn out with fatigue, and they can't get on faster, they have come a weary way, the night is dark, the road (a murrain on such roads say I, and they who made 'em) is choaked up with bushes, and as uneven as a ploughed field, and hilly to boot, I much question if we shall be able to proceed fifty yards further, besides I begin to fear we have taken the wrong path, Alas! and alack-a-day, would we were at our journeys end,—”

“Silence!” exclaimed Sir Godfrey, “Hear you not the sound of a bell,” “listen!” the clear but melancholy notes of a distant bell were at that moment heard to chime irregularly, “Sir Godfrey with some emphasis and in a voice of trembling agitation” exclaimed “It is,—it is the fatal bell, its unhallowed notes strike horror to my soul,—Oh! torturing remembrance of what I once was—cease—cease thy harrowing cries, distract not my brain for ever, drive me not by thy tones to perpetual madness.”

These frantic exclamations were interrupted by Oswald, “Your worship” said he, “will you give directions what path we shall choose next, though a-lack and alas, and well a-day, they seem pretty well all alike, but perhaps your honour may be acquainted with these dismal parts, and can tell where the sound of that bell comes from.”

Sir Godfrey heaved a heavy sigh and answered, “Thou sayest right good Oswald, it is the great turret clock of the towers of Brandon Abbey.” Remount the carriage and let Ralph guide the horses; pursue the direction of the sound,

and continue your course to the right, the end of our journey is now near at hand. Oswell did as he was ordered, internally praying to all the saints in the calender for a safe deliverance from his perilous situation; lashing pretty smartly his worn out cattle, the carriage proceeded on its way once more. The clouds had by this time dispersed, and the storm having ceased, the opening in the trees here and there admitted the partial reflections of an autumnal moon, cheering for a short interval the drooping spirits of the travellers, and aiding for a time their imperfect knowledge of the road; but its welcome rays were not of long duration, for as they advanced, the trees became more thickly interwoven, rendering obscurity more obscure, and after a few more paces, the travellers found themselves again involved in total darkness. Phœbe and Ruth, Bertha's attendants clung closely to each other, and nought but the dread of Sir Godfrey's anger prevented their giving vent to expressions of terror which momentarily increased. The lovely Bertha had for a short time reclined in peaceful slumbers upon the breast of her father, till awoke by the scalding tears, the bitter drops of a broken heart, which fell from the pallid countenance of Sir Godfrey as he muttered to himself, "sleep, sleep on sweet child of injury, and balmy be thy slumbers, peace and innocence possess thy bosom unruffled by the storms and cares of life;—sweet Bertha, unconscious of the miseries that await thee, thy repose is calm and undisturbed, thy dreams are the imaginary emblems of anticipated happiness—Ah God,—Ah God! once like thee poor offspring of suffering thy heart broken parent knew the blessing of peaceful repose, and the days of his youth promised felicity and joy, but now bitter and sad reverse, I no more look forward to days of delight and happiness, my smiling prospects of promised bliss are blasted, and the sun of my happiness clouded and set for ever;" Alas, how low has sorrow in a few short months laid prostrate my strength and energy, revered, idolized Emily, worshiped of my soul, now lost to me for ever, buried deep—deep in the cold, damp, silent tomb, no more shall thy angelic form break like morning's sun beams on my sight, no more shalt thou writhe in agony beneath the blasting powers and tyranny which not even a husband's sacred rights could guard thee from, accursed fate, barbarous savage, remorseless Hubert—Oh, heavenly powers! ye who watch o'er the innocent, sleeping or awake, ye from whom the treachery and wiles of guilt are not concealed; hear, oh! hear my prayer—strike—oh, strike the fell destroyer in his pride of power, hurl on him thy avenging retribution; bare thy red arm of thunder, exterminate him and his detested race for ever, assert thine own power and justice, and avenge thy suppliants injuries, "Alas, alas! my brain wanders and maddened by fatal recollections forgets the voice of instinct!" "No, I will not curse thee Hubert, the call of nature still must be obeyed, I cannot be deaf to its appeal for though a villain, thou art still my brother; yet can I not forget 'twas thy cursed ambition that plunged me for ever in a gulph of woe, robbed me of all my hopes of bliss, and only left me days of misery and horror, nights of madness and distraction, yet, for all this I will not curse thee, nor call heaven's wrath upon thy guilty head, I will leave thee to its searching anger, and in the deep recesses of my grief swollen soul, closed from all eyes save one, will I for ever bury the fatal secret of my wrongs, and when those wrongs recur to my distracted mind, I will strive to remember, the blow that seared up for ever my lost felicity and peace, was the work of a brother's hand whom I once loved and trusted; I will restrain those bitter maledictions which long pent grief and agony concealed, would fain heap upon fraternal villainy and ingratitude." "A dreadful mystery evidently hung over Sir Godfrey Brandon, and which he was unwilling should ever be questioned;" It was strange that at scarcely a moments warning he should leave his former habitation in the dead of the night, dismissing all his established household save the very few attendants that now accompanied him on his present journey without assigning any other reason for so unexpected a change, but that he was no longer entitled to the tenure of his late Demesne which was situated in one of the most romantic wilds of Scotland.

The domestics in wonder declared their willingness to obey the orders, and follow the fortunes of their master to the gloomy forests of St. Moreton, where amid the ruins of Brandon Abbey he was compelled in future to seek a last and only remaining residence.

Sir Godfrey was highly pleased at the readiness of his domestics to perform their duty, and enjoining them all to strict secrecy, he quitted his late hospitable mansion to commence a long and tedious journey through the mountainous wilds of Scotland, and across more than half the kingdom of England.

It was on the close of the sixth evening when (as we have already described) they gained a distant view of the forest of St. Moreton, and the towers of Brandon Abbey; whose gothic and turreted ruins were almost lost in indistinguishable distance. It had once been famous for its riches and grandeur, and as a monastery was dedicated to Saint Moreton, but the subsequent irregularity of its order, together with the despotic tyranny of one of its ancient lords, had stripped it of all its former wealth and consequence, insomuch, that the haughty Baron of Brandon had under unjust pretence, demanded heavy contributions to assist in carrying on the war between the first Edward, and the nearly subdued Scots; his only excuse for such open violation of ecclesiastic rights was grounded on a discovery it was pretended he had made of one of the Nuns, having broken the sacred rules and stained her purity by a disregard to her vows of vestal celibacy. The haughty tyrant greedily seized upon this circumstance, as the means of succeeding in his ambitious designs, he entered the abbey, demanded from the superiors not only an acknowledgment of their obeisance, but a large sum of money; and to cover his injustice pretended it was designed for the further prosecution of the holy wars. The superiors proudly refused compliance, but the Baron knew the surety of his proceedings, and exposed the apostate crimes of sister Agatha, relating every proof of her lapse from that sacred vow which for ever enjoined the community of a monastery to celibacy. The sum demanded was however eventually produced and sent to the Baron as an act of indemnity, but the wily Baron made such continual and large demands, that the once proud Monastery stripped of its shrines, its coffers, and its wealth, became entirely dependant on his caprice, till at length the king unknowingly rewarded his tyranny (the Baron having assisted him with large sums of gold) by granting him hereditary possession of the Abbey with all its tenures, revenues, and riches; the Baron then took undisputed possession of his new acquisition which he speedily transformed into a splendid and princely mansion.

The Abbey was in itself an immense pile of superb gothic structure, and by the wealth of its own coffers was soon transformed into a most magnificent and regal abode. A tradition has been handed down, which states, that the Baron did not (though possessing a mine of wealth) enjoy that happiness which his wishes led him to hope for; he was ever after, subject to the most gloomy passions and melancholy abstractions of mind, which often ended in violent paroxysms of madness; it was also said that the spectre of Agatha the unhappy instrument of his destruction, had repeatedly appeared to the Baron to warn him of his heinous offences, and even accuse him as the cause of her ruin and subsequent punishment by death. The Baron lived not long to enjoy the splendour of his ill gotten wealth, he was heard to confess that peace of mind was for ever banished from his heart, and though lying on the downy couch of luxury, and tasting all the blessings that immense wealth could bestow, yet, did he never after enjoy an hour's undisturbed conscience, his death was the departure of guilty horror and alarm for the future; and he quitted the world with curses and execrations on himself, leaving no child to inherit the domains of Brandon, which descended to his next heir, who being in every way unlike his uncle, refused to reside in a place that had been obtained by fraud, violence, and injustice.

From this period Brandon Abbey for near a century and half had acknowledged several lords, but was very rarely honoured for any length of time by the presence of its possessors, who were in general eager to shun a place whose

traditional history teemed with dark and mysterious records. The Abbey had not been inhabited for any length of time since the first Baron became its possessor, the last owner deceased was (so it was believed) a distant relation of the present inheritor Sir Godfrey Brandon, who now driven by a mysterious destiny was seeking its long deserted ruins, to hide himself and family from the dreadful consequences of an overruling fate no human wisdom could avert, but in the hoped for security of this long forgotten and remote retreat.

The real cause of Sir Godfrey's sudden removal to this last and unhappy resource was unknown; his servants had indeed vainly endeavoured to conjecture it, and had in their own minds formed a vast many chimerical conclusions, but they never attained to the truth; even his much confidential attendant old Oswell, could obtain no clue to guide his search into the mystery of his masters conduct. Satisfied, however, with the high wrought honor of Sir Godfrey's temper and character, he had on so sudden an occasion exerted all his influence with the rest of his companions that were elected to attend Sir Godfrey, and to his kind offices his master was indebted for the otherwise unwilling obedience that was exacted; yet the suddenness of their journey, its long and fatiguing continuance, together with the gloomy remote and even terrific habitation they were speedily approaching, began to raise fears and doubts if not uneasy suspicions, in the minds of the domestics, particularly as the carriage at length emerging from a narrow path, entered upon an opening admitting the moonbeams which shone upon the towers of a ruined fabric, the dismal and gloomy mansion which they were in search of.

Fear, doubt and suspense, filled the minds of Oswell and Ralph, as they caught the first glimpse of the time worn towers of the abbey, whilst the females Phoebe and Ruth shrunk back in the carriage vowing that they could never possibly make up their minds to venture into so horrible and ruinous looking a place.

Sir Godfrey who for some time had been deeply plunged in meditation, which had banished from his notice all passing events, was now roused and startled by the united exclamations of his alarmed domestics, and rising his head suddenly, caught a full view of the southern angle of the Abbey. Years had passed since he had seen it, and even he shuddered as he again viewed the frowning exterior of the dreary pile, and half repented that his haste had led him to select so desolate and ruinous a place for his future residence. The carriage now suddenly stopped at a little distance from an open avenue which led immediately to the abbey.

"Your worship," said Oswell (opening the door of the vehicle) his voice tremulous with fright, "shall we proceed further or shall we turn into another path and seek the shortest way out of this dismal forest, for surely, your excellency will never think of entering yon frightful old ruin, which alas, and alack-a-day, looks for all the world as if it would fall and bury us all alive beneath its crumbling battlements; or, perhaps we shall have to encounter a battle with an army of ghosts and hobgoblins, who will dispute our right to take possession of their gloomy apartments."

"Peace, I command you," angrily interrupted Sir Godfrey with a raised tone of voice, and a dignity of manner that proved to old Oswell, he had better say no more upon the subject, "I did think Oswell; continued Sir Godfrey, that you at least possessed more courage, than to admit the impressions of such idle fears, as even your female companions would blush to express; the seat of my ancestors though long deserted, and now perhaps destitute of every comfort, has, I will answer for it, nothing that can justly alarm or excite cowardice in the minds of my servants, if however, yourself or any of your companions fear to enter with your master the building he has chosen for his future abode, you shall have my free permission to remain with the carriage till daylight, whilst I and my daughter will alone seek admission within a mansion that hereafter will become our chief residence."

"Alack, alas, and well a-day" exclaimed Oswell, "only to think of this

now!" that your worship should doubt the courage and fidelity of your poor old servant, your honor knows but little of your poor servant's heart, if you doubt his attachment to his master and his house; I only mean't to propose leaving the Abbey for some more hospitable shelter till morning dawned, instead of seeking admission at midnight to so dismal and dreary a place.

Sir Godfrey accepted this weak apology, and desired the domestics to pursue their way, for the storm which had for a time abated, began to rage with redoubled violence, rendering it absolutely necessary for them to seek a refuge within the Abbey walls, from the fast descending torrents of rain to which they were exposed, and the terrific sheets of vivid fire which incessantly flashed around them. Phoebe and Ruth flattered by the trifling compliment Sir Godfrey had paid them, stifled their feelings, and concealed their inward terrors.

With much difficulty a passage for the carriage was forced through the thick underwood over a rugged pathway, and at length halted beneath the battlement ramparts of the Abbey. Sir Godfrey descending from the vehicle, walked with a cautious step and scrutinizing gaze, a considerable distance beneath the walls, before he arrived at the heavy gates of entrance. These he found securely closed, and resisting every effort to force them, with an obstinacy that surprised him; calling loudly to his people, who were trembling with fright and terror from head to foot, he commanded them to approach and combine their strength with his. But the gates proved the security of their interior holds, for not a single fastening would yield one atom to their united attack; Sir Godfrey paused in astonishment at such unexpected resistance, when suddenly the idea flashed upon his mind, that the Abbey might be inhabited, although well aware that no living being had his permission to enter its precincts, and he imagined that the traditional terrors of the place were a sufficient guard against all unknown intruders; yet if inhabited, 'twas not improbable but it might be the dreadful haunt of banditti, to whom its lonely situation and the extensive dimensions of the forest, might render it a most excellent place of concealment for their daring purposes of plunder, and of murder. For a short time these terrible thoughts occupied the mind of Sir Godfrey, and rendered him irresolute in purpose. How to proceed became now matter of doubt, lest he should expose his family to more imminent and real dangers, than the imaginary ones of poor old Oswell. At length a violent flash of lightning determined him as it glanced along the walls of the Abbey, and gave to instant view its tottering turrets and broken gothic casements, still magnificent in ruins, as in its proudest days of towering splendour; it showed also at no great distance, a small angle postern, whose weak and dilapidated state seemed to promise more success to the wanderers, who determined to try if they could not find more ready admission here; the postern was extremely old and ruinous, and seemed only held by the bolt of the lock, which soon gave way to the attack of the domestics, and crossing beneath a heavy gothic arch, they found themselves within the area of the first court; Sir Godfrey followed by his terror stricken and trembling attendants, was hurrying onward, till remembering that the females were left unguarded in the carriage, and might suffer increased alarm from the violence of the storm, and the absence of their companions, he ordered one of the men to return instantly, and await with them the event of his bold attempt to gain a shelter within the ruined Abbey.

Oswell, ashamed of the late deserved rebuke which his former cowardice had drawn down upon him, summoned up a sort of desperate courage, and avowed his determination of attending his noble master, "alack, alas! and well-day," said he "what need have we to fear, our noble master is with us, we are all good men and true—" "Mercy on me what's that!" the wind—"only the wind." Then bringing materials from the carriage, he lighted a torch and followed with pale and trembling apprehension, his calm undaunted conductor who with cautious steps now advanced through the wide area of a second court, which being strewn with crumbling fragments of the ruins, rendered his advances slow, difficult, and dangerous. At length by dint of perseverance, he reached a flight

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of steps which seemed to lead up to the grand portal of entrance, but the stormy darkness of the night, and the feeble glare of the torch, as it flashed on the black and frowning walls, admitted but of a very imperfect certainty; Sir Godfrey however resolved to ascend, and poor old Oswell faltering beneath the combined weight of his own corporeal frame and his increasing terrors, dared not again interpose his resistance; his legs had got St. Vitus's dance, his teeth chattered though he dared not speak, and his hand was palsied by fear, as he attempted to hold the torch steadily to the great folding doors of Dutch like form. Sir Godfrey after some forcible efforts burst them open, and entered what appeared to be an immense hall of indistinguishable size, and terminated in the distance in vista's of huge pillars, whose lofty heads like the roof they supported, were impervious to the joint rays of a single torch, and were enveloped in an awful and misty gloom, impressive beyond expression, and productive of solemn and astonishing sensations to the startled beholder.

Poor Oswell in spite of his assumed bravery, began to wish as he found himself in this damp cold awe inspiring hall, that seemed to conjure up ten thousand superstitious horrors, and terrific imaginary appearances, that he had not been so prodigal of his services, nor can it be said that the simple trepidation of Oswell was without foundation, when it is considered, that unlettered and ignorant as he was, and eagerly catching at every outward appearance pertaining to the marvellous, the solemnity of a scene so entirely favourable to the most extravagant ideas of superstition, was sufficient to powerfully excite in his mind the greatest terror. Respect, however, for his master, and the fear of receiving a second rebuke held him silent, but he failed not to address himself inwardly to every saint his memory could think of, for their protection against the spells and enthrallments of all the dark inhabitants that he doubted not were legions in invisible tribes beneath the roof of this terrific fabric. At length their further progress was barred by some steps which led up to a gothic door, which after much difficulty was forced back, and entering its dark precincts, Sir Godfrey found himself within what appeared to have been an anti-chamber to an opposite apartment, the folding doors of which he hastened to open; and its interior displayed a large antique room, with the forms of several crumbling pieces of furniture, which, from the number of its raised couches, now covered with a thick coat of mildew, and blackness seemed evidently the remnants of a chamber, that had once been stately, and magnificent. Sir Godfrey scrupulously surveyed it; the walls although dripping with damps, seemed tolerably entire, and appeared to promise them security against the dangers of the night.

Tired and exhausted as he was, he resolved for the present to seek no further, but to content himself with this resting place, till returning daylight should enable him to judge how far it was possible to put his design in force, of making the Abbey habitable; and since he had as yet seen nothing to excite alarm or dread, he hastened to the carriage and declared to its inmates his resolution.

The females knowing that to recede or return was now an impossibility, obeyed with trembling and reluctant steps, and advanced very slowly supported by their male companions, whose courage was very little better than their own; whilst Sir Godfrey taking Bertha in his arms, conveyed her to the Abbey. Bertha was yet too young to catch the infectious terrors of her attendants, but refrained not from expressing her wonder, that her father should leave their happy home, for such a dreary frightful place as that they were advancing to. Sir Godfrey kissed the cheek of his darling daughter, who had embraced his neck; but sighing deeply, he remained silent to her innocent interrogatory; and the little party gained in safety the interior of the hall. Upon minute inspection, the great gates were found to possess many strong bolts and chains, remaining as they had been left for many a year unhooked to their fastenings; these were now after a loss of time carefully placed in their holds for the night, and followed by his pale and trembling attendants, who all clung closely to each other, Sir Godfrey once more passed into the interior of the chamber he had discovered.

Oswell and Ralph, who had by command of their master, cut down several branches from the forest, now set them alight within the wide spreading hearth whose brisk and crackling blaze soon dispelled the damp and gloominess of the dreary chambers, and at length compelled even the long and woe begone visages of the timid women, to relax into something bearing the appearance of a smile; which together with the kindness and condescension of Sir Godfrey, and the remembered fatigues and dangers of their perilous journey through the forest, when compared with their present shelter, and the comforts of a welcome and plentiful meal, succeeded at last in making a very palpable alteration, although the dreaded apprehensions of the forlorn place they had entered still harassed their thoughts, and ever and anon, they would cast a terrified glance round every part of the desolate chamber, in momentary expectation of witnessing some horrid spectacle, which their wild alarms and conjectures failed not to conjure up in their bewildered senses. Their repast ended, Sir Godfrey commanded Oswell to place before the fire some of the strongest couches, and cover them with the packages in his charge, and not disdaining under existing circumstances to repose himself in the same chamber with his humble dependents, he ordered each to take a wrapper and compose themselves to rest. The servants were grateful and delighted for this considerate permission, and soon forgot the terrors and dangers they had felt and became alike insensible to their gloomy and forlorn situation; and the storm which howled without, and now shook the trembling fabric with each fresh gust of wind that swept over its ruined towers; Sir Godfrey having previously committed Bertha to the care of her female attendants, sunk on his knees in prayer to him who tempereth the wind to the shorn lamb, and earnestly, but humbly having entreated protection for himself and family (from weariness and exhaustion) calmly sunk into sweet and tranquil sleep.

CHAPTER II.

EARLY in the morning, after a time spent in vain attempts to sleep for any lengthened period, Sir Godfrey arose. It was a delicious morning, the storm had passed away, and nature had once more resumed her calm and beautiful appearance; having removed a broken window shutter, a rich and exhilarating perfume filled the chamber; he looked with a melancholy feeling over the tall trees of the forest, rising and throwing their taller shadows over the dewy turf, and the last mists now beginning to clear away, and blending with the bright blue sky; every thing was silent,—silent as the grave; save indeed, the carol of the birds. Sir Godfrey pondered deeply o'er his situation, his child's forlorn state—she, the beloved of his heart—of his new views in life,—of her he had once doated on; he could not but feel, that a great and fearful change had come over him since the days of his earlier manhood. In this frame of mind, Sir Godfrey knelt down to express his thanks where they were most due, for his slight oblivion from misery during the past night, and for the health and safety himself and family had experienced.

He then arose, and paused upon those fatally unknown occurrences that had caused himself and family to take refuge in a place so remote, dreary and inhospitable, as was the Abbey of Brandon, to which, cut off from all human hope (the only solace of the wretched and heart broken) the victim of cruelty—treachery, and injustice, exposed to all the vicissitudes of a life passed in a place



lacking every comfort and even shelter as did Brandon Abbey, were added the mysterious sorrows of a fate none could avert ; the sweet sympathy of friendship denied him, increase of anguish alone presented itself, and his once happy but now broken heart, looked forward to repose in the termination of life alone. Sir Godfrey sought the couch of his child, she who alone bound him to the earth, and for whose sake he stood like the scathed oak against the blast of adversity ; his child, the sweet slumbering innocent Bertha, smiled as she lay before him wrapped in dreams of the scenes of her early and happy days, when all was joy, and hope, and sun-light, ere the storm had come, and blight had fallen upon the vivacity of virgin youth, she was the dear and only pledge of his worshipped Emily's love, the only tie that bound him to existence, the tender orphan who from the thorns and precipices of a deceitful world, sought a secure barrier in her only parent ; tears bedimmed Sir Godfrey's eyes, as his whole soul yearned with unutterable tenderness for his unconscious child calmly reposing in balmy peaceful sleep. "Selfish being," exclaimed he, "am I to wish my days of misery shortened, whilst thou sweet Bertha, the counterpart of the idol of my soul, demandest that protection which by nature and paternal love, I am bound to yield thee ; no, dear, beloved Bertha, thou shalt never be deserted ; thy father who would willingly face the grim tyrant death in all his terrors, and end a life of wretchedness unparalleled, who loathes the world and all its hollow vanities for thy sake, will even pray that his days may be prolonged, and—oh, omnipotent providence ! thou who searchest and knowest the inmost recesses of all hearts, hear, and deign to answer thy humble creatures fervent supplications, in the unspeakable plenitude of thy goodness, may the days of

the heart broken father, though weary of his sojourn in the vale of tears, be lengthened for the protection and prosperity of his child, and oh ! thou who lettest not a sparrow fall to the ground without thy knowledge. and hast mercy upon the meanest of thy creatures, even upon the worm which crawleth at our feet, endue her with superior fortitude, lest, without thy all sufficient arm she sink unresigned and abject beneath a subdued spirit, and a broken heart." Sir Godfrey overcome by the intensity of his paternal feeling, wiped the perspiration from his brow, and brushing the tear from his eye kissed the cheek of his still sleeping child, and approached the door of the chamber, for feeling well assured that sleep would no more visit his couch, were he to make the effort ; he resolved to allow his Bertha and the weary domestics to take their rest unbroken, and use the present time in exploring the various apartments of the Abbey. In crossing the antichamber, Sir Godfrey saw nothing to engage his immediate attention ; the walls were damp and mildewed, and the lofty windows covered with slime and blackened dust, and cased thickly without with an almost impenetrable coat of luxuriant ivy, descending the steps of the outward door, he entered the grand hall, whose extensive dimensions and immense long vistas, even by daylight were scarcely rendered visible through the solemn gloom that hung over this heavy structure ; its roof was very curiously wrought with black arched rafters of massy oak, on which were carved many emblematic descriptions of holy writ, every appearance fully indicated that this building had been the superior church of the Abbey, in its conventual state ; on either side were several large casements, and at the east end rose in a magnificent point, the grand altar window richly stained and emblazoned with various arms and devices ; but, yet the interior of the design of the church was totally destroyed, and the dinginess of its immense pillars, with the delapidated black sides of its bare walls, would have had a tendency to conjure up ideas even in the stoutest heart of a superstitious nature. Approaching one of the south windows, which seemed less encumbered with ivy than the rest, Sir Godfrey discovered an extensive square, terminated at a distance by the battlement walls of the Abbey ; he perceived also to the left, the outward enclosure of the cloisters now become nearly a heap of ruins, a sad memento of their former splendour.

Sir Godfrey, as he gazed upon them in melancholy meditation, could not forbear comparing them with the fallen fortunes of his own house ; large masses of stone lay scattered in the square, which here and there displayed the tops of monumental tombs, the only sad and mouldering records which now remained to mark the spot, where reposed in silence the ashes of those, who in their days had been beloved by their kindred, respected by the world, and honoured by their sovereign. Sir Godfrey with a deep drawn sigh, moralized on the vanity of all earthly grandeur, when he reflected that the mouldering forms long since buried beneath these perishable memorials, were perhaps no more remembered by weeping posterity, and of whom not even their monuments would retain a vestige to tell who once was *he*, who in this world now is *nothing*. A spot so melancholy and forbidden he well knew, could never have been selected for the brilliant residence of his great predecessors, and casting his eyes around in search of some other outlet to the more entire parts of the building, he beheld on the opposite side, the frame of a gothic porch, towards which he hastily bent his steps ; but startled, when on his approach to the interior passage, he found the door at its extremity half unclósed, and from its aperture admitting a stream of light. This circumstance greatly alarmed and disconcerted Sir Godfrey, since it seemed to confirm those suspicions he had entertained on the preceding evening, and he began to feel almost positive conviction, that the Abbey was the rendezvous of a band of robbers, to whom he had recklessly exposed the lives and liberty of his child, himself, and domestics.

Though borne down the rough stream of adversity, Sir Godfrey was a man whose heart knew no fear ; and upon whose dauntless bravery and courage, no slur had ever been thrown ; nevertheless, due precaution was necessary for the

real security of his family, he therefore silently advanced along the passage, and eagerly listened for the sound of human voices ; nothing broke upon the solitary and death like silence that reigned around, he then boldly threw back the half opened door, confident that no human being even though a bandit, would do violence to a single and a defenceless man ; the place he now entered appeared to have been the lesser chapel of the monastery, though it was apparent from the difference of the style, in the alterations it had undergone, that it had been converted to the grand hall, belonging to that wing of the building, which the first lord had repaired and beautified in a superior style of magnificence for his own residence ; the pillars that ran round it, supported the grand gallery that led to the higher apartments, two immensely wide flights of stairs, led to the different corridors that evidently conducted to the superior apartments above ; he now proceeded to a large folding gate in the west side, which from its ponderous bars, and the strength of its fastenings, he concluded must formerly have been the grand entrance to the Abbey, but wishing more particularly to test the convenience of the apartments within the building, he, for the present declined any further examination of the exterior, and turning to his left, entered to his utter amazement, into a long suit of rooms, which notwithstanding their silent, deserted and ruinous state, he was overjoyed to find might not only be again rendered habitable, but in a little time convenient and even comfortable. Astonished at finding these rooms in a condition so far superior to his warmest expectation, Sir Godfrey proceeded more minutely in his examination, and forcing back the old and worm-eaten window shutters ; as he scrutinized each separate apartment, he found that though now in a state of decay and ruin, they still bore strong testimony of their former elegance, and grandeur. The whole suite of rooms were eight in number, and (though from age covered with mildew and dust, and crumbling to tatters) still retained many remnants of furniture, which evidently witnessed the splendour of their former owners ; the arras though fallen in many places from the walls, would still have showed marks of its pristine beauty, had not the moths and the despoiler old father time, have done their work upon it ; many mirrors of vast magnitude remained entire, whilst others situated in the more exposed positions, had fallen from their splendidly carved frames, and lay shatter'd on the ground. Satisfied that these chambers would amply answer his present wants, and rejoiced to find them in such a state of preservation, as to make their repairs not only possible, but easy ; Sir Godfrey returned to the hall, perfectly satisfied that no one had for years entered these melancholy chambers, and that all fears for himself and family from banditti were absurd and groundless. He now resolved to ascend the grand staircase, where landing on the first corridor he found it, though much of its lustre was faded and past, richly bedecked with gilded carved work of most beautiful and superior workmanship, and every appointment in all the sumptuous magnificence of the thirteenth century. The walls were but very slightly scathed by time, except from the loss of some of the perforated fret work, or the fall of a broken pillar of the ballustrades that surrounded the open galleries, and here and there, lay scattered on the ground ; the gallery was supported by the pillars of the hall which showed the magnificent taste of the first lord, and from the symmetry and elegance of their shape, had doubtless undergone their present altered appearance from those of the church, by the orders of Sir Godfrey's great ancestor, who he felt now convinced, had added that wing of the Abbey, to the ancient site which already he had viewed.

This gallery still retained (though much broken) its noble windows, placed at the east and west extremity, from the latter of which was to be obtained a fine, though solitary prospect of the principal avenues leading from the forest to the shores of the sea, the casement of which Sir Godfrey with difficulty opened, and was agreeably surprised to behold a broad piece of water gently meandering through the overhanging arches of the trees, that thickly lined the sides of either bank, and rushing impetuously beneath the very walls of the Abbey, it

was lost in a number of wild irregular turnings, till receding towards the left, it was distinguished at a distance glittering through the openings of the trees as the sun pierced their gloomy shades, and sparkled in reflected brilliance on the bosom of the stream. Leaving this pleasing and tranquil view, Sir Godfrey followed the turnings of the gallery, till an arched porch led him into a long suite of ruinous apartments, which from the plainness of their decorations proved them to be the offices of the inferior domestics of the household of his ancestors.

Retracing his way back to the gallery, Sir Godfrey kept on his course till another portal of heavy gilded fretwork attracted his attention, and opening a richly carved gothic door, he found himself in the interior of another suite, whose lofty walls and faded remains of rich velvet furniture, still bore testimony of these having in times past been the state apartments of Brandon Abbey, though now sunk in desolation and ruin beneath time, the rude leveller of elegance and beauty, the destroyer of all things, scarcely an emblem of their former splendour and magnificence was remaining. Sir Godfrey viewed each object of faded grandeur with silent resignation and contentment, seeing with pleasure that these apartments might once more be restored to comparative comfort and convenience, whilst the sombre shaded turn of his pensive mind, received with glad welcome the certainty that he need seek no further for an asylum which the possessions of his ancestors had bequeathed to him in the melancholy and forgotten ruins of Brandon Abbey.

“Yes,” exclaimed Sir Godfrey, “retirement and seclusion from the busy haunts of deceptive man, is all that now remains for me to wish, and here is the spot to gratify my desires to the utmost; these long deserted towers, these crumbling ruins, these awe inspiring recesses, are indeed congenial with the temper of my soul, they will afford indulgence to my melancholy and sorrow, here,—alone, undisturbed by all—unwitnessed by mortal eye, I may give free vent to all my feelings; these romantic though gloomy scenes, will prove a peaceful refuge to my wounded mind.—Nay, he even paused in wonder at his thoughtlessness, that he had not on a former occasion (when some years back a dreadful change in his life had taken place) chosen this sequestered spot as a secure retreat from all the storms of a perilous and troubled destiny.” Sir Godfrey now felt that every former surmise of robbers was at an end, and thought of hastening to his family, thinking should they have awoke and discovered his absence how great would be their consternation and alarm, when he perceived in an obscure angle of the apartment a small door, to which he proceeded determining to satisfy his every doubt; with much labour he drew back the rusty bolts, and discovered a long distant gallery, a number of antique doors lit but by one gloomy window met his sight, these he resolved should remain unexplored till some future opportunity, ascending a broken flight of spiral stone steps, he entered a small vaulted chamber, lined and paved with stones; the turret in which this chamber was situated was of a circular form, and jutting out considerably from the main building, had consequently received greater damage than the rest, he approached one of the angular window spaces, which commanded a fine bold prospect, and from the extreme height of the turret rising above the tall tops of the neighbouring pines, an unconfined view was obtained of all the surrounding scenery, rich in varied beauty, and romantic wildness; the vast spreading bosom of the immense wooded forest was a principal object, bounded only by the distant mountains of the north, whose lofty tops reached to the clouds, whilst other of the window spaces, served to display unconfined, the extensive track of ground, which the Abbey walls covered; to the east were seen its ruined cloisters, covered with wild shrubs, and ivy entwining itself amidst its arched roof, whilst many of its hanging turrets had forsaken their ponderous and lofty towers, which like the former, lay levelled to the ground in almost indistinguishable heaps of rubbish, columns, fallen pillars, and broken arches, with here and there a half remaining wide extended space, that once had contained the sculptured frame of the exalted window, bounding and increasing the romantic beauty of the

scene, by confining the eye, as it gazed through the empty arcades, with a rich luxuriant glow of shaded ether, backed by the summits of the hills, covered by the forest pine, as it waved majestically to the influence of the winds, and affording a picture of beauty and solemnity beyond the powers of description.

Sir Godfrey now descended for the purpose of trying if there were no nearer means of his reaching his sleeping family; than retracing the great distance which had led him to his present station; having reached the third flight of the turret stairs, he found himself in a long narrow gallery, passing forwards, he opened several old doors in hopes they would lead him to the great hall, or church, but they only held to view a number of mouldering recesses, perhaps in former times cells of a monastery, whose flooring was so much decayed, and in some places so fallen in, as to render any further attempts at progress equal dangerous and impossible. Tired of this fruitless search, he proceeded to the extreme end, where he met with a stronger door, which occasioned him no small difficulty to unclose, when to his amazement a violent scream rung in his ears, and as he threw open the arched door, he beheld his terrified party, who awakened by the noise of forcing the panel, had arisen and regardless of all false delicacy in such a moment of horror, the females had rushed into the arms of the men, to whom they clung shrieking for protection, against nothing less than a legend of hideous and armed spectres, whom their affrighted fancies had in an instant conjured from their graves as coming to punish the rash adventurers for their presumptuous intrusion.

As the door fell back with a harsh sounding and tremendous crash, which reverberated along, and shook the vacant gallery, the whole party distilled to a jelly by fear, fell prostrate on their knees, both men and women closing their eyes, and uttering half suppressed groans, and fervent ejaculations to St. Thomas, St. Cuthbert, and every saint in the calendar they could remember for mercy, expecting nothing less than to be murdered, or carried away in a flash of fire, they fell flat on their faces, uttering their Ave Marias with such rapidity, that one word seemed as though it would break the others neck, and as they endeavoured to repeat them, they began afresh at the latter end, and rendered it a scene so truly ridiculous, that even Sir Godfrey though exceedingly angry at their folly, could not refrain from smiling, and whenever he attempted to raise his voice and bid them rise from their ludicrous postures, they rendered his speech completely inaudible by cries and shrieks, which made the room resound, and bears a strong affinity to the noises of a mad-house, at length in a pause of silence, Bertha perceiving her father, rushed joyfully into his arms, repeatedly and boisterously exclaiming—

“ ’Tis Papa !” ’tis my own dear papa returned, Oh ! how glad I am to see you come back again my dear papa !”

The servants being now convinced of their lord’s appearance, ventured to lift up their faces, which displayed a most whimsical contrast of pallid fear and shame; but guessing that Sir Godfrey had been to examine the ruins, they all fixed on him an anxious enquiring look, in hopes to read the welcome and wished for information that they were all immediately to return to the carriage, and quit the Abbey for ever, but, alas ! no such joyful confirmation could they distinguish, and each cast disappointed glances at the other.

Poor old Oswell exclaiming in an under tone “ Alack, alas, and well-a-day, our business is settled; I see by my lords stern look, that his mind’s made up to stay in this house of ghosts and hobgoblins;—Gad a mercy !—well, I must be mum; an I would escape another lecture,—you cannot put old heads upon young shoulders.”

Sir Godfrey having by his authority restored them to some degree of order, thus seriously addressed them;—I have explored the chief parts of the Abbey, and rejoice to find many of the apartments every way beyond my expectation. I need not therefore inform you, that here ends our journey. Workmen and other necessary persons shall be instantly engaged for the repair of this ancient

and too long neglected mansion ; which, as I mean to make it perfectly habitable, I have now only to assure all present, that the seat of my family has nothing in it to excite just terror, or to encourage misconceptions relating to unnatural and spectral beings, which never had an existence but in the overwrought imaginations of a heated and disordered brain. If however, there be any here present, who feel an unconquerable dislike to remaining here with me, you have only now to declare it, and I will supply the means of your immediate departure ; but should your love and fidelity for your lord induce you to stay, I must command that from this moment, you suppress these ridiculous and unfounded alarms, if you wish to be retained in my service.

I am content myself to make this the future abode of the lady Bertha, and her father, but I will not suffer any one to remain with me, who shall dare presume to break the order and tranquility of my house by their absurd fears, and groundless apprehensions.

There was a degree of dignity and resolution in the manner of his delivery that Sir Godfrey was glad to perceive had not failed of its intended effect ; the domestics were awed into silence and obedience ; and as they really loved their lord, whose whole deportment without being forbidding or haughty, still retained that dignified reserve that claimed unhesitating respect, and never failed of producing that implicit reverence, of which his people had always most powerfully felt the impulse, they were now eager to suppress all murmuring regrets, and disguising as well as they could their too apparent terrors, bowed their resolution in silence, though none of them dared to speak, lest the trembling hesitation of their manner should deny the consent of their tongues to await his pleasure.

Sir Godfrey an able reader of the human mind, soon deciphered the sentiments that passed in their hearts, and determined to accept this silent acquiescence to his command ; reasoning with them he put to flight their groundless alarms, his kindness and condescension soothed, and finally subdued them to submissive obedience ; and the first meal of the day passed over with tolerable composure, comfort, and satisfaction.

As soon as their small and unostentatious repast was ended, Sir Godfrey rose and desired Oswell to take one of the horses from the shelter they had found in the interior court, and follow him to the gates of the Abbey, for the purpose of discovering the nearest way out of the forest to the town of Etherwold, from whence a supply of food was now become absolutely necessary. As Sir Godfrey proceeded round the circuitous walls of the Abbey, remarking to old Oswell the vast extent of this once magnificent pile, which was sometimes lost in distance amid the trees, and then seen again beyond the space of a mile, peeping through the open glades of the forest ; he could not help remarking, the varied and picturesque effect produced, thus softened and shaded by the uncertain light which the sombre gloom of the woods threw upon the grey mouldering stones of this once splendid, and now ancient fabric. Turning towards the west, Sir Godfrey gained a full display of the grand front of the building, or rather that part of it which the first Baron had added to the original site ; Sir Godfrey pointed it out to Oswell, bidding him remark, that it was free from that ruinous and dreary aspect so prevalent and characteristic of other parts of the Abbey.

“ Alas, alack and a-well-a-day,” said Oswell rather slowly, and hesitating as if fearful of again incurring the anger of his master, “ to be sure, though bad is the best, it certainly does carry a more civil face with it than the horrible, ghastly ruins we have left, and I think my lord that if indeed workmen could possibly be prevailed upon to enter such a terrible dismal place, it might be rendered decent and habitable, since your honour seems resolved to live in it ; that is, said he to himself in an under tone, if they didn’t have St. Vitus’s dance with fright, and their hands shake so with terror, that they couldn’t make use of their tools to work with.” “ For my poor part my Lord,” continued he “ I will do all my endeavours to add what little comfort and conveniences my poor old

brain can think on, to oblige your lordship, and my kind beloved young mistress—”

“That’s my good Oswell” interrupted Sir Godfrey “who perceiving the garrulous old gentleman inclined to enter upon one of his long harangues, thought it necessary to cut it short in the beginning, remount your horse, and proceed without further loss of time, to the town I have already mentioned; I have consulted the geography of the forest, and find that the town of Etherwold lies to the west, and is not more than four or five miles distant from the Abbey; yonder avenue will conduct you to it, where if still living, you must search out Adam Blake, who was purveyor and steward to these estates, explain to him my present situation, and resolution to restore the Abbey to a habitable condition, inform him that I require his attendance, and give him full commission to engage such workmen and others as shall be needful for its immediate repairs; Sir Godfrey then depositing a well filled purse in the hand of Oswell, for the purchase of such articles of support as were requisite for immediate use, gave him a strict injunction to return before the fall of evening.

The old man immediately obeyed, and lashing his favorite steed into a fast trot, Sir Godfrey watched his motions till distance and the dark foliage of the trees soon rendered him invisible.

Turning from the avenue, Sir Godfrey continued his melancholy perambulations round the venerable pile; the north west angle presented to his sight an undulating stream, almost hidden beneath the thick umbrageous shades of the overhanging woods. Sir Godfrey saw with pensive gladness, that the Abbey would soon afford him a peaceful though solitary home from all the scenes and bustle of tumultuous life, and the plans he now formed for its improvement, and repairs would afford ample employment to his mind, and render him a source of pleasing amusement for a time, from the effects of those carroding sorrows, which dwelt but too painfully on the afflictive remembrances of unknown, or rather unrevealed occurrences.

A stranger on his first beholding the pale, melancholy Sir Godfrey, would have been tempted to view him with astonishment and suspicion, and conjectured that guilt alone could have driven a man, yet, in the prime and vigour of his days, to the gloomy recesses of such a place as Brandon Abbey. But if the discriminating observer looked a second time in his expressive countenance, he would feel the blush of shame mantle his cheek, for a conclusion so unjust, whilst his heart would not fail to upbraid him with cruelty, and inhumanity for the hastiness of his decision. Sir Godfrey Brandon was not older in life than three or four and thirty years, his stature was tall, majestic, and finely proportioned, his countenance commanding and open, and from the pensive melancholy that was so visibly cast over the whole of his features, he seemed irresistably to engage the reverence and respect not only of his own people, but of all who addressed him; though pallid, and clouded with an immoveable grief, his face still retained the traces of manly beauty, whilst his full, fine dark eyes, were more interesting from the deprivation of that vivid fire retained only by the happy few as yet untried in the bitter schools of adversity, affliction, grief, and long suffering.

Bertha, the only fruit of his marriage, was a beautiful and interesting child, and at the period this history commenced, had reached her eighth year. She was of a sweet and amiable disposition, and promised a rich maturity of excellence; Sir Godfrey loved her with more than even paternal fondness, for she was the only living treasure left him of an adored lamented partner, and he would gaze upon her for hours, dwell on each opening grace of mind and person, till the tears of unavailing regret, yet delighted affection stood trembling in his eyes, and were kissed away by the sweet affectionate Bertha. Her strong resemblance to his lost Emily was at once his ecstasy and torment. In miniature he traced alive each well remembered feature of the dear companion he had lost, and watched each movement of her form with eager attention, that he might strain still nearer to his memory, the living image of his worshipped Emily.

“Alas!” exclaimed he, “as he wandered on, and brooded o’er the days that were gone, vainly I strive to think, one subject only engrosses all my soul, one word only engages all my thoughts, that word is Emily; where’er I wander, her form is still before me, all else is chaos, in happier days oft in the calmness of the summer’s eve, with Emily fondly leaning on my arm, we have wandered together, and gazed upon the scene softly lit up by silvery moonbeams, till the world and all its toils and cares have seemed to fade away, and we were left the sole possessors of the earth, living but for each other; my prospects then how flattering, beloved and loving, all was joy and sunshine, then at the summit of my happiness came the rude storm, and all around was scathe and ruin; my hopes for ever blasted—where is she now?—mouldering in the grave, lost!—lost for ever. We will now leave Sir Godfrey to his melancholy meditations, and pursue the faithful Oswald through the shades of the dreary forest.”

Oswell, as he proceeded down the avenue, often cast back an anxious glance to see if he was still in sight of Sir Godfrey, who, though every step he took removed him further from his view, was yet a kind of protection to his apprehensive alarms so long as he could obtain the slightest glimpse of him, but when at length the turning of the avenue closed him entirely from his sight, poor Oswald’s heart beat a kind of tattoo to his fears, and the idea that he was now travelling alone through a wide desert forest, which might too possibly be the resort of robbers, or the ghosts of their murdered victims, the latter suggestion even more terrible than the former, made him set spurs to his steed, in hopes that the celerity of his motions, and the noise they occasioned would drown the sense of his fears, or at least outspeed his horrible imaginings, he tried once or twice to hum a stave of an old English ballad:—

The corpse it lay upon its bier,
Sir Hubert at the foot stood near,
When up it rose—all in the shroud;—

Here he paused—and looked around as though he expected to see Sir Hubert, and the sheeted corpse before him; once more he essayed to shake off his terrors, and to wile away the dreary monotony of his journey and sung:—

As on his bed the murderer lay,
His guilty conscience nought could stay;
It was not I, (in sleep he cried)
By her own hand the maiden died;
Then came a flash,—the thunder’s roar,
In stalked the spectre at the door.

Here at the ideas his own brain had conjured up, his voice ceased, his heart appeared bursting through his ribs, his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth, and his tremor was so great, that his hair lifted his hat from his head, and the poor old domestic could scarcely preserve his perpendicular upon his saddle; all his efforts to inspire a false sort of courage failed, and he continued unmercifully to goad forward his poor beast, who sensitive to the whip and spur of his rider, flew with a swiftness that might well defy a legion of spectres, or a host of banditti.

At length the cloudless view of a welcome sunshine, peeped through a distant opening and promised a speedy termination to Oswald’s terrors and adventures, and soon after, both horse and man foaming with heat and perspiration, the one from fatigue, and the other from fright, arrived at the borders of the forest, and to the sight of a poor but neat looking cottage, embowered in trees and shrub-



bery. Oswald, thought it was now quite necessary to curb the velocity of his horse, but a venerable looking old man who had been sitting beneath a spreading oak near the cottage, rose from his seat with surprise and fear strongly marked in his face, was hastening to avoid the sight of a visitor so uncommon and indeed so unwelcome, considering the place whence he came; when Oswald, having taken respiration and feeling his own fears subside as he beheld the dismay of the stranger, now ventured to call aloud and entreat his assistance.

The old man, whose appearance denoted him something above the rank of a peasant, stood irresolute to stay, yet fearful of going, lest his abrupt departure from his unwelcome visitor should provoke him to wrath, for as this fearful intruder came evidently from the dreaded forests of St. Moreton, to which were annexed horrors and dangers that had long filled the minds of the simple peasantry with terror and dismay; He dreaded what might be his purpose, and his fears overcoming his prudence, he was as anxious to get from Oswald, as Oswald was to get from the forest, the latter therefore could obtain no answer till angry and impatient at the old man's obstinate taciturnity, he again loudly vociferated his demands for assistance and a proper direction to the town of Etherwold. The old man now hoping that by at once answering this last request, he should rid himself of his unmannerly and troublesome inquirer, ventured to reply as he turned round, that it was only one short mile journey from thence.

"Can'st thou tell me honest friend," cried Oswald, not willing to be so easily dismissed, and at the same time casting a wistful eye on the neat comforts of the cottage, "I say friend, he again repeated after a pause of hesitation, can'st thou inform me if there be still one Adam Blake living in this neighbourhood."

The old man starting back with increased surprise and alarm depicted in his countenance, now lifted his eyes scrutinizingly and doubtfully up to the still elevated Oswald, and then after a considerable pause of minute examination, he demanded without giving an answer to the foregoing question,

“How I pray thee friend, came'st thou to know of such a person, and what may be thy business with Adam Blake?”

“The simple hearted Oswald, whose ideas never led him beyond the consequences of the present moment, now without the slightest hesitation entered into a full, true, and particular detail of his mission and the extraordinary occasion of it; adding that if such a person as Adam Blake was living, his master Sir Godfrey, lord of Brandon Abbey and its broad lands, (here Oswald assumed a pompous and consequential manner of delivery) demanded his obedience and forthcoming assistance and presence at the above named mansion.”

“Holy St. Hilda protect me,” cried the old man with a sudden burst of astonishment, and increased dismay darkening his furrowed countenance as he listened to this wondrous narration, “does any one live in the old ruined Abbey? now may St. Dominick, St. Gregory, heaven, and all the saints guard and protect them, and amen I say, from the power of satan and all his dark agents, that abide there, and restore them again to their proper senses; for surely friend, thy master must be possessed to think of living in such a horrible place.”

“Do I know ancient Adam Blake?” say'st thou, “Aye—Aye, truly do I,” continued he, suddenly breaking off the string of his exclamations against the Abbey, as he read in the face of Oswald, the fears that his slight account had raised so expressively in the features of the terror-struck domestic, “heaven be praised and blessed; old Adam Blake and I have been good friends these three score years and ten, or thereabouts. If thou requirest to be acquainted with him in honest seeming, stranger, thou shalt not further waste thy labour, for truly I am the Adam Blake thou seekest, and since now I find that thou art real flesh and blood, nor art of a robbers calling, thou shalt enter with me my lonely dwelling and welcome shalt thou be to share its homely fare.”

Oswell well pleased that this fortunate discovery had rendered the execution of his commission so prosperous, and not a little gratified by the courteous invitation of his new acquaintance, and the rest and refreshment he should obtain, alighted joyfully from his panting steed, and entered with his host the cheerfully and neatly arranged cottage.

“Here good dame,” exclaimed Adam to his aged partner, with a hearty kindness in his manner that spoke the sincerity of his welcome, “Here dame have I brought thee a stranger, who coming from the old Abbey yonder, must need lack of something to cheer his spirits; though St. Thomas knows muttered he between his teeth, there is no lack of spirits there,—come dame, I pri'thee bring my best stone flagon of old hock, and what else of our yesterday's fare thou can'st muster speedily.”

Dame Mabel with wonder and curiosity stared for a few seconds at the stranger, and anxiously longed previous to fetching out the viands first to gratify her own loquacious propensities, till Adam rather impatient at her delay, imperatively repeated his commands for the gratification of the stranger's hunger; dame Mabel was thus compelled to desist for the present from satiating a long string of inquiries, her tongue (rarely silent) longed to give vent to, and the table was therefore the sooner spread with all the little dainties the humble cottage could produce.

Oswell well pleased with the plenteous meal, failed not to recruit himself additionally for the late terrors he had experienced, nor did the fine old hock in the best stone flagon remain unhonoured. Nature's wants supplied, Oswald became quite merry and communicative, and dame Mabel sat all attention in eager expectation of some very horrible revelation of a mysterious secret. Oswald entered at large upon the whole of his late journey, and its termination at Brandon Abbey.

“What,” cried the old dame in no very concordant tone of voice, “what say’st thou?—live in such a place as the haunted old Abbey, merey on us friend, what is thy master mad! does he not know that it has been uninhabited for more than one hundred years, excepting now and then a month or two, by workmen just to keep the west front in repair, and does he not know besides, that it is all over so full of goblins and spectres that no living soul will ever set a foot near it, and heaven forfend they should, why nobody will even so much as cross the corner of the forest, because the great south tower is seen there when no other part is, and because in one of the high battlement turrets every night—

“Peace, peace Mabel,” cried Adam hastily, and hold thy idle prattle, “If my lord chooses to reside in the old mansion, ’tis not for us to raise reports against it that may offend him, and as for the ghosts and goblins you talk so very foolishly about, (here the poor old man forgot his own previous exclamation to the same effect) that is the least evil to be feared, for in my mind the crazy, tottering old building will never afford shelter to any thing human, except indeed the owls and bats that build in the ivy, if a body may call them human beings, yet truly” continued he musing, “’tis rather wonderful when one comes to think upon it, that Sir Godfrey should choose such a lonely desolated shattered place to live in, yet ah, well—well, he knows best; we have no business my good dame to pry into our lord’s motives or affairs. There’s one thing I can say, heaven be thanked mine is a clear conscience, for I have been a just steward, and have kept duly and truly an honest account of all the rents I have received, and all the arrears that for these five years past, have been unclaimed by the owner of the Abbey; the few tenants and vassals that still remain on the estate, would fain have refused payment of their fees, but my lord will find old Adam was trusty even to a single angel;—aye—aye, tomorrow please St. George, I will go once more to the old Abbey, and like a faithful servant, render up to Sir Godfrey my just accounts.

“What! go to the Abbey,” screamed Mabel at the utmost pitch of her shrill voice, and dropping from her hand the best stone flagon as she was going to remove it, which falling on the stone floor was broken with a loud crash, that made poor Oswald jump up a yard from his seat, “what, you Adam, you go to the Abbey,” she again repeated, regardless of the damage she had occasioned by the fracture of the best stone flagon, and the loss of the old hook, “why Adam, man,—Adam Blake! art thou in thy right senses?—forsooth thou art not, thou art growing as mad as his lordship is, and I fear me hast caught the infection, mercy on us all—the evil spirits have got loose from their bounds, and will destroy us all in our beds at this rate, why Adam, don’t you remember when you went last to the Abbey some years ago, just as you had entered the great gates, what a horrible”—

“Nonsense,—nonsense,” interrupted Adam with a wink intended to silence the increasing loquacity of the persevering Mabel, “You see all these idle terrors and superstitions are done away; did not Sir Godfrey and his family sleep there last night, and is not Mr. Oswald here alive to tell us so; I pri’thee good dame be more discreet and fill not the mind of our guest with thy ridiculous fears and fancies, but make him welcome with our village news, whilst I and Hugo will go in quest of such supplies as Oswald was commissioned to take back with him.

Adam had no sooner quitted the cottage, than Mabel with distended features and affrighted aspect echoed her husband’s words, “take back with him,” repeated she, “the virgin be our guard,—surely Mr. Oswald you will never attempt to think of returning to those haunted old ruins again? oh! I could tell you such tales as would make your hair untwist its locks, and turn grey with fright, if it did not even kill you outright; merey on us, I only wonder I am alive to repeat them.” Here Mabel forgetting, in defiance of her husband’s injunctions, the silence he had commanded, entered into marvellous long details of improbable sights, of bleeding heads flying at midnight over the forest to the Abbey, spectre nuns, blue fire seen from the windows of the ruin, the old bell tolling of itself at

midnight, shrieks and groans, ghosts unnumbered with bleeding wounds, issuing from the cells and cloisters in all the terrific description of the most horrible supernatural appearances.

Poor Oswald really a coward at heart, sat with his eyes ready to start from their sockets, his knees knocking together, his teeth chattering and trembling in every joint.

Poor Oswald listened to the monstrous extravagant stories of dame Mabel, (the palpable nonsense of which any person but the most timid and bigoted must have discovered) and gave implicit belief to all the wild incoherences she uttered whilst his new increased terrors of the forest and the Abbey, rendered him more than half irresolute, and he anxiously wished for some plausible excuse to delay his return till tomorrow, for though Oswald was tender-hearted, yet he was also a complete believer in the existence of supernatural beings, and would not have doubted the power of a ghost to enter his chamber through the keyhole, or even through the solid wall itself, and his mind long labouring under superstitious prejudices, rendered the internal struggle of fear and duty a terrible trial; fidelity however conquered, and he determined upon returning to his master, though he greedily drank in with an attentive ear the horrifying exaggerations of the garrulous old dame Mabel, who finishing her long stories with the history of the old Baron of Brandon, and the unfortunate but beautiful sister Agatha thus concluded, and more than all, the spirit of sister Agatha is seen every night, that is if any body had the courage to go and see it, walking up and down the great long aisles of the church, then advancing to the altar, where it kneels till the next hour of the clock strikes twelve, it then stalks out of the great doors, which fly open at its approach, and walks to the great south tower, where she utters three loud shrieks, when the ghost of the wicked old Baron is forced to come, (and serve him right, heaven guard us,) and the ghost of Agatha drives him with a firebrand in one hand, and a dead child in the other all over the ruins, till they arrive at the very chamber where the Baron used to sleep after he in so treacherous a manner got possession of the Abbey. Dismal yells, dying shrieks and groans are then heard to echo through all the apartments, and blazing lights thrown about the great north bedchamber till the great turret clock which has never for many a weary long year been touched by mortal hands, heavily tolls two and sometimes three strokes upon the bell.

Cold perspiration dropped from every pore of old Oswald's frame as he failed not to remember the sounds of the bell, that he and the whole party had heard echo through the dismal forest as on the preceding evening, they drew near to the conclusion of their journey; "and moreover" added the prating old woman, with an exalted tone and an assumed importance of manner, "the late possessor of the Abbey who was a lady, came some few years ago to our cottage, she seemed rather haughty and imperious, and demanded the keys of the old building, she went with only one attendant, (a strange, ugly, gruff looking sort of man, in spite of all I could do to persuade her), to the dismal old place, promising to return the keys to Adam the next day, after they should have discovered some papers which they came in search of, but mark the end of their self will and perverseness good Mr. Oswald, the next day came in its due time and so did the following, but as might very naturally have been expected, brought with them neither lady nor attendant; at length Adam thinking some mishap had attended them, went with a good strong party of the tenants in search of my lady to offer his dutiful attentions; but would you believe it Mr. Oswald, (drawing herself closer to him in mysterious whispered confidence) no lady was to be found, the great gates of the church stood wide open and they searched through every part of the old Abbey, even some of the vaults were examined but to no purpose, my lady was never seen or heard of afterwards; the tenants were so frightened that they ran away and left Adam by himself to fasten as well as he could the gates and entrances, and from that time to this he has kept the keys; the Abbey is grown more frightful, and doubt-

less my lady was carried off by the ghosts for her boldness in disturbing them in their gloomy habitation."

Fortunately for Oswell, Adam loaded with purchases that instant entered the cottage and put an end to Mabel's wonderful relations. Adam saw plainly from the pallid looks of his guest, the manner in which Mabel had entertained him, he very angrily reproved her for her garrulous folly as he termed it, and became as anxious to do away with the impressions they had occasioned as Mabel had been lavish in exciting them.

At length, aided by another flagon, he in part succeeded, which being soon finished in such willing hands, produced the desired effect of inspiring Oswell with something like resolution once more to brave the terrific dangers of the Abbey, who notwithstanding the exclamations and cries of Mabel, to entreat him not to provoke the anger of the saints by disregarding what she had told him, and rashly running into sure destruction, persisted in his design and mounting his horse (now well stored with many comforts which the foresight of Adam had provided) he took a hearty leave of his kind and hospitable host and hostess, and galloped once more down the avenue towards the Abbey.

The sun was fast declining, and as its last beams faintly tipped the horizon and tremblingly faded from the sky, the woods assumed a browner shade, whose dark foliage excluded the light and really conveyed an idea of desolate gloomy wildness that might well fill a stronger mind than Oswell's with fearful sensations, when added to such objects was the increase of terror which the tales of Mabel could not fail to impress his mind with. Poor old Oswell as he proceeded on his journey, fancied every bush a ghost, and expected every moment to see some dismal apparition flit athwart his path with all the appalling and horrible concomitants of Mabel's outrageous and imprudent stories.

The shades of night were fast descending before he arrived in sight of the western front of the Abbey, where he joyfully recognized his master, who had for some time been pacing the lawn in front of the building, impatiently waiting the approach of his servant.

Sir Godfrey's attention was too much engaged in attending to the answers he received to his questions, to notice the death-like paleness spread over the whole countenance of Oswell, and his satisfaction was considerably augmented to learn that Adam Blake still lived and would be at the Abbey on the ensuing day; a brisk fire with the addition of plenty of light and the stores Oswell had brought made the evening pass off better than might have been expected in so desolate a situation, and the doors of the chambers being tolerably well secured, the whole party at an early hour resigned themselves to sleep.

Poor old Oswell however remembering the terrible account of sister Agatha's spectre passing through the great church doors, could not so easily enjoy the comforts of repose; he remembered also that there was only the antichamber between him and this tremendous chapel, and his terror as it approached near the time he supposed the spectre usually took its midnight walks was extreme; he laid attentively listening to every sound till the very bed shook under him, nor did the cry of the screech owl among the outward battlements, or the humming of the wall beetle and the cricket, serve much to allay the terrors he laboured under. At length he allowed his imagination so far to obtain the ascendancy of his reason, that he fancied he actually heard the great church gates fly back and close again with a loud crash; a kind of lethargic stupor now seized his senses, and tired nature claimed her rights in spite of the imaginary horrors he had created to himself, sleep overtook his bewildered brain, and the rest of the night passed away tranquilly and undisturbed.

CHAPTER III.

The morning's repast ended, Sir Godfrey repaired through the north gallery to the western hall, where, as he with much difficulty unfastened the gates, he beheld several persons slowly winding their way up the tangled mazes of a different avenue; among the foremost he distinguished according to Oswell's description the venerable old Adam Blake whose grey hairs and unembarrassed countenance gave an honorary dignity to his whole person. The great gates of the outward court were beyond Sir Godfrey's strength to open, he therefore walked round to the south angle, where also Adam had directed his party to follow him, and entering the court, the old steward no sooner beheld his master than bending his knee he welcomed in due form and with ancient ceremony, the lord of the Abbey to his rightful inheritance.

Sir Godfrey then entered into such details as were sufficient to satisfy Adam of the legitimacy of his claim to the domain of Brandon; the latter had by dint of great persuasion, prevailed on some hardy labourers, bribed by the promise of a good reward to accompany him to the Abbey for the purpose of repairing the interior. The honest old steward also brought with him all his papers, accounts and money, the latter being the produce of the rents of the estate, which had been faithfully gathered and hoarded up for the lord of the demesne, whenever he thought proper to claim it, and which he now respectfully delivered to Sir Godfrey who highly commended his long tried honesty, and made minute enquiries into the state of his remaining vassals.

Adam's mind though greatly tinctured with all the superstition so prevalent in the fourteenth century contained nevertheless a great store of worldly knowledge, which when his ideas were called forth, and directed by a strong judgment to laudable ends, gave proof of the goodness of his heart and understanding; and Sir Godfrey found that in Adam he should possess a valuable acquisition, and a promoter of the improvements he now scrupled not to explain to him. Adam was himself most agreeably disappointed to find that the Abbey would admit of such beneficial alterations, and that the inquisitiveness of his own mind would receive ample gratification by the resolution of his lord, to make it for the future a place of residence and of course increase the good old steward's consequence among the tenants who of late indeed had shown evident symptoms of opposition.

For truly "continued Adam bringing to a conclusion a long harangue relative to the affairs of the estate," "Truly so please your excellence the lands have been so long forsaken, and are of late years so overgrown by the devouring inroads of the forest, that a great number of your lordships tenants have deserted their cottage, and settled themselves on the domain of my lord the Baron of Etherwold."

"Sir Godfrey starting," ejaculated, "of Etherwold! what said'st thou Adam? the Baron of Etherwold?"

"Ay, so, please your worship," responded the steward, "his lordship's castle is hard by, it is not at most more than three miles distant from the Abbey; if this confounded forest was not so thick and impenetrable, you might behold its great huge towers from the northern prospect where we stand; and might arrive at it a much nearer way than by the village, if you knew the beaten track that formerly used to run through the tangled mazes of the woods from the ruins to the castle itself."

Sir Godfrey became much agitated and his open and manly brow became suddenly clouded at the unexpected mention of a name that evidently had given some severe shock to his feelings, a deep thoughtfulness pervaded his features, and

His mind became so abstracted as to render him insensible to all around, nor did Adam Blake's loquacity receive the slightest attention or reprimand.

"But my lord the Baron," continued Adam, "is truly a very haughty noble, and a hard imperious master, and many of your tenants (so please you Sir Godfrey) will with joyful alacrity and light hearts, return to their fealty when they hear that their own chief is coming to settle among them. The Baron they say is gone to the wars with the Duke of Northumberland, but my lady the baroness and her two sons are shortly expected at the castle, so your lordship will not lack of society while they remain in those parts; report does say, that her ladyship is not quite so happy as she deserves to be, and that the Baron being much given to the terrible passions of jealousy, has commanded the Baroness to leave the court during his absence. But heaven preserve the poor dear lady, she is too good for him I fear, and though sweet lady she brought him great riches and the Barony of Etherwold to boot, yet the dear soul is as weak and humble to all his wishes, as if she had only been a poor peasant's child rear'd in obscurity, instead of being of noble blood and every way the Baron's superior.

Ah, well-a-day, well-a-day, it is not always the good that fare the best in this bad world, for the wicked often bear down all in their mad career but then,—I say nothing—but in the end they have their reward; he had a former Baroness indeed when he was only the poor lord of Wilden, who had so daring a spirit that she held his tyrannical passions in complete control, but the submissive humility of the lady Elvina Etherwold endures all his overbearing tempers with uncomplaining patience.

Sir Godfrey who had been deeply buried in meditation upon the deeds of days long past, heard but very little of Adam's long speech, who as he concluded drew himself up with an air of no small importance, but the mention of names, doubtless not unfamiliar to his ear, made him start and forcibly recalled his attention to present circumstances, for suddenly turning to the garrulous Adam, he demanded if the present Baroness was his lordship's second wife.

"Adam replied in the affirmative."

"And she is then the heiress of Etherwold," he quickly rejoined, "Doubtless my lord of Etherwold, her father, is not living?"

"No my lord," answered Adam, "he died some years ago, bequeathing to his only child Elvina the whole of his possessions, in trust for her son the present young heir of Etherwold and its rich domains."

The countenance of Sir Godfrey before, stern, gloomy and overcast suddenly underwent a change, his melancholy dispersed, and after reiterating his directions to Adam, he proceeded himself to overlook the workmen already employed in the necessary repairs. Sir Godfrey's mind, now deeply engaged and insensibly withdrawn from the contemplation of those corroding evils that had so long disturbed his peace, was imperceptibly recovering its proper tone, whilst the active part he was compelled to take, permitted him no leisure to dwell over those dreadful and secret sorrows, that had ultimately robbed his cheeks of nature's bloom, and his weary eyes of the balm of rest.

Oswell and Ralph had no time to spare, for any further expression of their doubts and terrors, whilst even the house keeper, and Ruth found such ample occupation for their abilities, and began to feel such satisfaction in assisting and observing the improved state of the Abbey that their fears for a time found no room for employment. In less than a fortnight the interior of the Abbey began to wear a very different aspect to the delapidated condition it at first presented; the west front was soon made not only habitable but comfortable, the chief apartments were stripped of their melancholy remnants of tattered furniture, which being cleaned and mended, (such as would bear the operation) with the addition of some auxiliary purchases were soon put in tolerable order for present use, and Phoebe and Ruth when they took possession of their respective chambers, could not help confessing their surprise and pleasure at the wonderful alterations that had so rapidly taken place, one half of the range of the west front in little more

than one month's time was rendered perfectly safe, and having undergone complete repair, the apartments very soon began to lose much of their desolate and forlorn appearance, three chambers were fitted up at the north east angle of the pile for the future residence of the steward, they were very remote from the more inhabited parts, and it was a work of long entreaty before Sir Godfrey could prevail on the venerable old Adam to take possession of them.

Dame Mabel in fact had been the chief cause of his long resistance, but at length Adam, whose whole energy of character lay in his justly deserved merit of respectful reverence and obedience to his lord's commands, assumed also the authority of a husband and at last by threats, persuasions and entreaties, compelled the poor horror stricken old dame much against her will, to partake of the real and solid comforts of their gloomy but magnificent change, who rather than stay alone in the cottage, the sole alternative left her, consented to venture into the Abbey though not until she had received a most strict and positive injunction from Adam, never to let her tongue outrun her discretion by relating to the domestics any of her terrific stories so calculated to operate upon the weak minds of the timid, and fright the household from its propriety on pain of his, Oswell's and Sir Godfrey's eternal displeasure.

The domestics very soon became reconciled to a situation it was not in their power to alter, the improving appearance of the Abbey began imperceptibly to decrease their former terrors, and although it certainly still retained its original sombre gloom, yet the comfort that had succeeded their first entrance into the dreary pile, so discouraging and awe inspiring in every respect, at length began to banish some of those vague and idle terrors, which the uncommon change that had taken place, inspired in their minds; the doors and avenues leading to the conventual side of the building, were all strongly barricadoed and secured, and even the great gates of the church opening into the western hall were nightly locked and bolted with warlike security, a concession Sir Godfrey willingly made to his people, to quiet their fears and secure them as they hoped from the ghosts that frequented the north, east, and south ruins, whose chambers and recesses (such as had not yet fallen) were suffered to remain in their latest state, and were committed to that sure and gradual fate, whose mouldering hand had long since seized their aged forms and needed only one rude blast to overwhelm them into nothing; the entire part of the western front of the Abbey was now nearly restored to a slight degree of its former splendour; the outward battlement walls were strengthened and every breach repaired, and every postern and gate was rendered impregnable against the attacks of unwelcome intruders.

Sir Godfrey now began to feel in these awfully wild recesses, more internal satisfaction than he had experienced for many years. This remote and forgotten retreat would exclude him for ever from mixing with the fawning sycophants and hypocrites of a detested world, and here unchecked and unrestrained by the unwelcome and grating voice of intruding curiosity, he might give free scope and indulgence to his secret sorrows; in these venerable towers and gloomy sequestered groves, he could shut out the busy scenes of life and all its vanities, its bickerings its enmities, its storms and dangers, where there's no hope, no trust, where all is transient, hollow and deceitful as the sea, which one moment bears you up in sport upon its billowy bosom, and the next engulfs you in its foaming tomb of waters.

The effects of such dangerous indulgences as Sir Godfrey allowed to his feelings in these sequestered shades, were never expressed when in the society of his family, before whom he ever appeared with a satisfied and even a cheerful countenance; and with such an example before them his servants dared not breathe in their lord's hearing, a dread of their gloomy and deserted abode.

Mabel indeed who loved any body's society better than her own, would often in the long evening's quit her remote apartments, and steal to the servants hall, where, listening to the wind as in hoarse murmurs it shook the weakened turrets and fancying every gust that caused the old wainscot to crack, was the cry of a



ghost or a death warning, she would draw her chair with that of her companions, in a close circle round the cheerful blaze of the wide hearth, and having strengthened her memory with a few additions of her own, would relate at full, the stores of old traditions, the Abbey being chiefly the seat of action, whose haunted chambers had each a particular fate of dreadful note and legendary apparition, till at length the cheeks of the terrified listeners became blanched with fear and horror, who creeping still closer to each other, dared neither speak, look, nor stir on one side, lest a ghastly spectre should start from the gloom of their wide and spacious dimly lighted chamber, and punish them with some terrible infliction of supernatural power, whilst the gentler winds as they whistled moanfully among the branches and falling leaves of the trees; Mabel would obstinately and roundly assert, were the sighings of sister Agatha, the murdered nun, whose spirit driven from its former abode by the rude intruders upon its favorite haunts, was now wandering round the exterior of the Abbey, dissatisfied and lamenting in dismal bewailings its unhappy state.

One evening when the domestics had sat up to an unusual late hour—thus fearfully employed, dame Mabel was hardly pressed to sing them the legend of the murdered nun, which after much persuasion and old Adam being engaged with Oswell upon business and not likely to interrupt them, she consented to do; the door was cautiously closed, the lamp trimmed, and every seat drawn as close to the other as possible, every face was pale as marble from horrible anticipation and

scarcely a breath was heard, the dame after fearfully gazing round the chamber timidly began:—

Young maidens all, of low degree,
List awhile to my minstrelsy,
'Tis of a damsel young and fair,
Who fell into the spoiler's snare;
On her, the sire he did prevail,
All in her youth to take the veil,
She loved a knight of low degree,
A gallant brave, as fair was she;
So list unto my minstrelsy!

Her sire, he was a Baron bold,
Who'd acres broad—and store of gold;
A noble lord—he saw the maid,
To gain her love in vain essayed—
The Convent gate her lover scaled
And on the damsel soon prevailed
To leave her dungeon and be free
And o'er the borders with him flee;
So listen to my minstrelsy!

The cruel Baron watch did keep,
And on the noble youth did leap,
With strong nerved arm and phrenzied brain,
He clave his helm and skull in twain;
From his black steed he fell and died
Ere he could call his Agatha bride,
Dragged to the Convent then was she,
Imprisoned in a cell to be;
So listen to my minstrelsy!

Next night the Abbess was arrayed
In all her pomp, to try the maid,
Who was condemned, ah, tale to tell,
Alive, to be walled in her cell;
In narrow space she was confined,
Bricked up—but patiently resigned;
By the stern Abbess's decree,
Who did with joy her anguish see;
So listen to my minstrelsy.

By violence the Baron died,
And fiends sat gibbering by his side,
The Abbess was in sackcloth clad,
And died a maniac raving mad;
The spectre of the murdered Nun
Nightly appears—at toll of one,
In grave clothes clad,—sad sight to see,
Praying her bones may buried be;
Here endeth now my minstrelsy.

As the old dame concluded, the alarmed domestics all huddled as close to each other as possible, when a heavy sounding footstep broke upon their startled ears, they were immediately terrified into the belief that it was the ghost of the great

wicked Baron or of sister Agatha herself, till being manually convinced by a pinch of the ear from Adam Blake, (who came to chide Mabel for her long stay) and which proved they had to deal with real flesh and blood, the panic stricken party recovered from their fears and hurried in a body through the halls and long winding galleries, nor fancied themselves in security till sleep rendered them alike insensible to their terror or the cause of it.

Sir Godfrey during some of his researches into the distant upper stories of the Abbey, had passed through a long range of rooms that led by a panel door from his cabinet to the south west angle, whose fast decaying chambers presented nothing to engage a more minute inspection; at the end of the gallery however, he discovered a small ancient door, which on opening led him into a light closet or antichamber, his curiosity was aroused to see more, and he resolved to continue the search, after much time he discovered a well concealed door, which having forced open, he was astonished to find himself in the interior of a large, old, dreary chamber, lined and filled with innumerable quantities of books, which had doubtless from their dates and the gloomy antiquity of the place been the library of the fathers of the Abbey of Brandon; upon opening some of the volumes that were not yet totally defaced by age and mildew, Sir Godfrey found much subject for future amusement; among others Sir Godfrey found some traditional manuscripts that really appeared to be valuable, nor were there wanting some curious volumes of old English poetry and history; the room itself was of a very gothic and dreary appearance, its narrow pointed windows were covered with a thick coat of ivy, which, as Sir Godfrey attempted to break away, gave him a slight view of the south east ruins and the great heavy battlements of the southern tower; Sir Godfrey resolved to have this chamber cleaned and aired, and after great persuasion his commands were at length obeyed, the most useless of the books were cleared away, while from the rest he made a pleasing and even a valuable selection which were removed to the west oaken parlour, for the use of himself and Bertha; the windows of this ancient chamber were stripped of some of their luxuriant furniture and air being admitted, many of the remaining books were recovered from the total extinction which their characters had long been threatened with. But the library was too near the dreaded ruins, to be often troubled with the unwilling entrance of the domestics, whom, nothing but the absolute presence and commands of their lord, could induce at any time to approach it; at length, even Bertha caught the general panic its dreary aspect occasioned, and Sir Godfrey was often for hours shut up alone in its rude solitude, where, alas! he gave but too unrestrained an indulgence to his sorrows, in retracing in living characters, those unknown woes he so carefully concealed from every beholder.

Winter with its frosts and snow was now approaching with rapid strides, the trees were stripped of their foliage, the scolding wind sung wildly through the bare branches, and all around served but to make desolation more desolate. Sir Godfrey nevertheless still continued his accustomed evening rambles through the recesses of the woods; one evening as his mental meditations had cast an unusual thoughtfulness over his mind and rendered him insensible to all nearer objects, he wandered from the banks of the stream and lost himself in an unknown dingle of the forest; night was approaching and only a second light was admitted through these gloomy groves, when the cry of a female as if calling for assistance, struck on his ears. Surprised and startled at a circumstance so unusual, Sir Godfrey hastened to follow the sounds, anxious to render assistance to whoever might stand in need of it, and as he hastily continued to traverse the different avenues, he beheld a slight opening in the trees, that admitted still some shades of daylight, and displayed at no great distance a lady richly habited, but whose dress seemed slightly disordered, sitting as if in pain, beneath the shaded bowers of an ash tree, Sir Godfrey respectfully approached to offer his assistance.

Their eyes encountered each other, and in an instant were rivetted as if by enchantment to the mutual glance; Sir Godfrey starting back a few paces, as if in doubtful amazement, at length exclaimed to the no less evidently astonished lady,

“ Either my eyes deceive me, or my reason has failed me, or both ; yet if I trust the belief of my senses, I again behold the lady Elvina Etherwold ! ”

“ Gracious heaven ” cried the lady, (sinking on the arm of Sir Godfrey which he had extended for her support) “ Art thou then indeed still living ?—is this reality, or do I dream,—say quickly my Lord ! art thou indeed my once beloved friend ? art thou ”—

“ I am Sir Godfrey Brandon,” vehemently and hastily interrupted he, preventing the conclusion of the lady’s speech, which he pronounced with a wild expression in his eyes, and an increased agitation of manner, that in a moment repelled the pleasurable sensations the lady Elvina’s heart had felt at an encounter so wonderful and incomprehensible, and that now filled her eyes with tears of pity and amazement, for the countess had once known the all accomplished and unrivalled Sir Godfrey Brandon, whose impression not even his changed and altered state could erase from her mind ; for whom indeed she had felt the tenderest regards of interest and friendship, “ Sir Godfrey of Brandon ! ” she repeated in a tone of astonishment, doubt and anxiety, “ Sir Godfrey of Brandon said’st thou my lord ? ”

“ Yes lady,” quickly answered Sir Godfrey, with a terrific expression of countenance, and an increasing agony of manner, “ wherefore ask you thus my name ? or, why seek you to know the horrors it engenders, is it not Godfrey Brandon ? ”

Whether the Countess felt offended, or what in reality was passing within her mind is unknown, but she seemed evidently struggling to collect herself, and taking from Sir Godfrey her hand which he had retained, she moved slowly but with dignified firmness a few paces from him and thus addressed him,—

I know my Lord that the title of Brandon is yours, but you will forgive me the former doubts I expressed, when you remember it is but lately that it became so, and you must recollect I once had the honor to call you by another, more suitable to your station ; but, I pray you pardon this unwelcome intrusion, I feel I have been too long an intruder on your privacy. Passing through these remote forests to the castle of Etherwold, my Palfrey suddenly took alarm and separated me from my attendants ; In attempting to alight, I slightly hurt my foot, but the pain is now allayed, I beseech you sir, to accept my thanks for your timely aid which the approach of my servants no longer renders it necessary that I should trespass further on—

Here the quick trampling of numerous horses through the avenues, proclaimed the arrival of the lady Elvina’s servants, and in some degree recalled the recollection of Sir Godfrey, the wildness of his eyes became softened to a more impressive and sorrowing character, and the blood once more circulated over his before pallid countenance ; fixing on the lady Elvina a look of entreaty, he besought her permission to accompany her to the verge of the forest ; and the latter feeling the strongest emotions of pity, as she cast a timid but expressive glance on the face of Sir Godfrey, from the knowledge that he had laboured under a slight fit of insanity, now motioned to her people to keep behind ; and addressing herself to Sir Godfrey with a mild yet dignified reserve becoming her high rank in society, she thus energetically exclaimed—

“ My Lord of Brandon, that I have beheld you with astonishment unrepressed, I fear from my ill timed questions, you cannot but have perceived, neither can I now suppress that womanish curiosity, which, while I entreat your forgiveness of, I also implore by the memory of her we have both so loved, and who now sleeps in peace with the silent dead, according to report, but who I hope may still be living, that you will deign to gratify ; if indeed, I ever did possess the honoured title of friend, let me conjure you to explain the mystery of your re-existence ; for since report has for more than five years asserted your decease, how must the heart of tender sympathy rejoice to find, though strange and wonderful the discovery, that you are still living, still mindful of those you once esteemed ; and still more strange that in a place so unfrequented as the wild mazes of this gloomy forest, I should again behold my so long regretted friend, under circumstances that

whilst they agitate my soul with nameless conjectures, yet bear the stamp of mystery and concealment."

Sir Godfrey, who had taken the arm of the Countess within his own, (and which indeed a number of agitating emotions that internally beat in the heart of the latter, rendered now necessary for her support) leading her considerably from the attendants, after a deep drawn sigh had a little relieved the excess of his feelings, thus spake:—

Lady Elvina, in me you behold the miserable victim of treachery and black ingratitude, a solemn vow—deep sworn—deep witnessed, irrevocably binds me to secrecy, not even death can dissolve the accursed act, which dared I to reveal, my life and that of my child (more dear to me than all) must pay the forfeiture; the abhorred and accursed mystery must never be explained, the chains of injustice that have rivetted my disastrous destiny in this world can never be unlinked; yet such parts of my unhappy tale as relate not to my dreadful engagements, and those only, I will hereafter inform you of; but gentle lady, seek to know no further than the limits I prescribe you; at present, be content to know, that these gloomy woods, and yonder dismantled towers are the residences I now inhabit; its melancholy retired situation will afford me a secure shelter from the destroyer of my peace; if therefore your long tried friendship can still outlive the wreck of what I was, you will rely on the honor of Sir Godfrey, and though you may disapprove the dreadful secrecy my fate imposes, yet will you learn to pity, when you are made acquainted with such parts of my wretched life, as under the solemn seal of secrecy, I will to you and to you only reveal. In the meantime (he added with a sudden degree of dignity in his voice, and a flush of indignant anger crossing for a moment his pallid cheeks) be content to learn that though I suffer unjustly all the oppression and misery of such a fate, yet, is the soul of Godfrey incapable of dishonour, however, he may feel the increased affliction of being suspected.

"Oh! heavens," exclaimed the Countess in extreme perturbation) "what may the import of this dreadful mystery be? Oh, my friend, forgive these doubts and confused expressions of a too anxious heart; but did I not know you for the possessor of unblemished nobility of mind, the dark sentences you have just uttered would raise conjectures, and, (forgive me) excite suspicions that ill agree with the high wrought temperament of your disposition. Ah me! some dreadful ideas rush on my fancy,—yes, 'tis impossible—but it must be so, my fears are but too true, and this deep hidden injury has its source in—say my lord—is not"—

"Oh! forbear—forebear," exclaimed Sir Godfrey in agony, name not the horrid title, wring not my heart strings with sounds so jarringly hateful to my soul,—oh, lady Elvina, whatever your conjectures are, let them I conjure you, be buried for ever in silence and security on the tablets of your soul; but seek not to draw from me a disclosure of that I am forbidden to reveal; at present I am only the sacrificed victim of inhuman ambition, do not then open afresh, those as yet scarce closed wounds; do not draw my sad heart to the comparative recollection of the happiness I have for ever lost, to scenes of extatic reality, which once had an existence, lest I forget myself, my child, and those horrid vows that bind me alas! to submission and silence, and rushing on the murderous destroyer of my peace and honor, at once immolate both myself and him, to the just vengeance of a heart bleeding at every pore with injuries, too keen for weak mortality to endure with resignation."

With dreadful and phrensied wildness and disordered mien, Sir Godfrey uttered these incoherent sentences, yet there was an innate air of conscious injured innocence in his whole aspect and manner, that forcibly and with dignity impressed belief.

The Countess unable to suppress the tears Sir Godfrey had excited, was grieved almost, that she had without intention, expressed a doubt of the integrity of one for whom she had ever felt no common warmth of friendship; she felt perhaps more keenly the pang she had added to the heart of the sufferer than he himself did; her desire however, to learn some account of lady Brandon, made her repress

the increased astonishment she laboured under, and with a faltering voice she in a low tone asked,—may I not inquire for the dear companion of my happiest hours? Ah, my lord do not disappoint my hopes, but conduct me instantly to the Abbey of Brandon, let me once more clasp the friend of my youth to my bosom. Since providence has so wonderfully preserved yours; no doubt the life of my Emily has also been his care, you do not answer me—it cannot be—is she then—

A convulsive exclamation of “Oh God! Oh God!” was the only confirming negative the Countess received, “Sir Godfrey hid his face in his sable cloak, and the distressed Elvina needed no stronger confirmation of the loss Sir Godfrey and herself had sustained.

A long and dreadful interval succeeded before either recovered outward composure sufficient to again encounter the afflicting expressions of each others looks; Sir Godfrey first spoke a few slight words of encouragement, and the lady Elvina though deeply affected at the solemn confirmation of her friend’s death, yet respected too much the sacred sorrow of Sir Godfrey to offer vain and ill timed consolations, she therefore as soon as she could trust her voice, thus addressed him—

It was reported my noble friend, that both yourself and child had been wrecked with the vessel you embarked in, on the shores of France; I will not venture to request the knowledge of the means of your providential escape; but say, is the sweet girl also an inhabitant of the Abbey?

Sir Godfrey was glad to be thus gratefully recalled from mournful contemplations, to the only bright side of his dreary prospects of ruined happiness, and replied,—We never reached the distant port you are misinformed of, the only hope and solace of Brandon’s weary pilgrimage, yet lives to cheer the melancholy hopelessness of a sorrowing destiny, my child—my beloved Emily, now only known by the assumed name of Bertha, yet exists to claim acquaintance with her amiable sponsor, if the lady Elvina will still deign to admit that claim to her pity for my friendless orphan.

“Oh! Sir Godfrey,” softly rejoined the lady Elvina, in a tone of expressive tenderness and commiseration, “Oh my dear injured lord, can you for one moment doubt the constancy of that friendship, whose bond was mutually sealed and pledged even to heaven itself; at least then let me here again renew it; and though I know not the occasion of your present mysterious sufferings, yet is my reliance (believe me Sir Godfrey) so firm on the honour of my brother, for so (though nature’s claims forbid the relationship) I have ever considered you, I do from this moment solemnly transfer that larger share of my perfect love, from the sacred memory of her who is now no more, to her yet living representative whose second maternal parent I will never (if permitted) cease to prove myself; corroborating circumstances now rush powerfully on my mind, and convince me, my lord, that you have too surely fallen beneath the ambitious machinations of some powerful villain; my heart bleeds at the recollection of the injuries I too fearfully suspect you have endured; but it is enough to know and to lament that you are unhappy, without rudely oppressing by useless inquiry the stricken heart; to the lordship of Etherwold, the claims of Elvina are not of a slight nature, nor am I destitute of friends whose powerful interests may be of service; command then all my resources, and remember my dear lord that the heart of Elvina must remain in anxious suspense, till the cloud that so long has obscured your peace shall be removed. The night is rapidly advancing and seems to threaten with portentous aspect a heavy storm, here then so please you my dear Sir Godfrey we will end our interview. Remember your promised communication; farewell,—may heaven protect you.”

Sir Godfrey raised the hand of Elvina to his lips, their former habits of strict friendship, seemed to admit of the unrestrained freedom of long tried fidelity, and the countess was herself too much agitated to think on any subject clearly.

“Sir Godfrey then, with a faltering accent,” exclaiming “the saints and angels have thee in their care, bowed trembling over her hand, which he resigned as they had now arrived at the verge of the woods, and hastily retreated back the way he had come; whilst the Countess whose heart was the seat of every female virtue,

and tender sentiment, stood for a few moments contemplating his receding form, till the gloom of the woods soon shut him from her sight; when wiping from her eye a tear given to the memory of past felicity, she proceeded towards the castle, deeply wrapped in meditative contemplations on the miraculous encounter with a once loved being, who she had long lamented as dead.

Whatever were the Countess's internal thoughts on the foregoing scene, she gave them no utterance, and for a time she was not permitted to dwell on their afflictive source; for as she passed the boundary of the forest, and began to enter the vale which ran at the bottom of the steep acclivities that overhung the sea shore, the towers of her ancient inheritance burst magnificently on her sight, seated on a huge rocky promontory, whose alpine steeps rendered this immense pile a fortress of impregnable security. The lady Elvina, as the first outline of the castle (which for many years she had never seen) caught her eye, felt all those thrilling sensations of delight, which can only be truly understood by those affectionate dispositions, who after a long absence from a beloved home, revisit once more a place that has long been endeared to the heart by a thousand sweet and tender recollections of past fidelity; where each little circumstance rises with renewed life, as in a mirror that faithfully reflects the images of things such as they were, and such as memory, constant to their actions, will often represent them; and passing over the tedium of a lapse of time that had succeeded, fancy, thus recalled, busily presents them fresh and nearly entire to the mind's eye, with all their attendant pains and pleasurable sensations. It was a work of no small labour to climb the steep mountain defiles which led up to the platform of the great tower gates; when arrived there, the Countess's page sounded a shrill blast on the horn; the great and ponderous portcullis was unchained, and the castellan unbarring the massy fastenings, the lady Elvina passed beneath the deep arches bowing to the salute of the armed soldiery, who were posted on the ramparts, passed quickly to the grand hall of entrance, where after graciously receiving the glad welcome of her numerous people, she proceeded with Ursula the old housekeeper of the castle to the great oak parlour, who now waited in respectful silence for her lady's orders. The parlour appeared more than usually dingy and gloomy to the Countess, who sighed inwardly at the coldness of her reception, having no other welcome to the mansion of her great ancestors, than such as the loyal attachment of her vassals dictated, and which, in the present uneasy temper of her mind, she had no anxious wish to have repeated.

The Countess having remained some time deeply wrapped in private meditation, at length observing that the room felt damp and cold, exclaimed in a mild, but evidently agitated tone of voice, "add more fuel to the fire, good Ursula, the night is stormy, and the forlorn aspect of this chamber needs a cheerful blaze to dispel the surrounding gloom."

The good old housekeeper obeyed the Countess's orders, and then respectfully bowing, said, with a tone of reverence; "Ah, my lady, I fear you will find this castle but a sad and dismal place to reside in; the frequent storms from the sea will create melancholy reflections, and oppress your spirits with regret for the splendid circles your ladyship has quitted."

"Not so my kind considerate Ursula," graciously returned the Countess, with a half suppressed sigh, "the enlivening intercourse of my children will be an antidote to solitude."

"Ah, that is true, so please your ladyship, but you will find the castle very dreary I fear, without other society." Here Ursula perceiving that her lady wished to be alone, bowed lowly, retired and closed after her the folding doors of the chamber.

"As Ursula quitted the apartment, the Countess heaved a deep and lengthened sigh," exclaiming "thy remark I feel is but alas too true; but my lord wills that during his absence this castle should be my residence, and although these gloomy and deserted turrets seem to frown upon me, increasing my depression of spirit and exciting forebodings of some impending evil yet unknown, and thoughts and fears

that freeze my very blood, yet will I most scrupulously obey the wishes of my lord and husband, and trust that my obedience will recompence me for the sacrifice required." The accidental interview with her long lost and long regretted friend Sir Godfrey Brandon in the forest was very deeply impressed upon the mind of the Countess, and often would she start in agitation and amazement at the suggestions of her internal meditations; now and then her eyes would survey with timid glance the dark sides of her antique apartment, now strongly illuminated by the additional glare of light that came from the hospitable and cheering hearth, nor could she at times help shuddering when she thought on the situation of the castle, situated on the pinnacle of a high and lofty rock, exposed to the dreadful tempest and fury of the elements, which now howled around and hoarsely murmured through the long sounding galleries, through whose empty spaces the wind rushed in fitful and moanful echoes, whilst sulphureous clouds pregnant with combustion, now blackened all the horizon, shutting in night with additional horrors, soon the thunder rolled along heaven's vaulted concave in awful grandeur, the blue forked lightning poured its vivid streams of liquid fire across the murky atmosphere, withering in its ruthless career the pine and the majestic oak; even the castle shook beneath its firm basis and rocked as though each moment, tower and battlement would be crushed in chaotic confusion. The terrors of such a night, her lonely and isolated situation, the saddened reverse of the destiny of her long loved and valued friends, all rushed at once upon her over charged mind. The fortitude of the Countess entirely forsook her, and she melted into tears of sorrow and regret; at length, overcome by grief and fatigue, she retired to her apartments for the night.

The morning rose serenely beautiful, every vestige of the late storm was dissolved; the castle which stood proudly and loftily exalted over the vast waters of the ocean, seemed to repose in solemn frowning majesty, the monarch of the surrounding scenes, rearing high its ponderous and gigantic towers. This castle had in former days been a fief of the crown of England, and ancient story records its towers as having been the witnesses of many a bloody, dark and fearful act; often had its proud battlements sheltered alternately the monarch, and the rebellious subject who dared to oppose his sway, many were the former sieges it had known, but its strong and impregnable bulwarks had as often resisted the attack by sea and land, and successfully resisted every manœuvre of force and stratagem to effect its overthrow. This ancient fortress was famed in days of yore, as having sheltered King John from the fury of his disaffected barons, and in after times many of its successive lords had proudly and triumphantly withstood the fiercest attacks of an invading enemy. An imperfect account of some dark deed still remains; and alas, the tale to be now recorded affords but too many proofs of the terrible events and dangerous superstitions of the fourteenth century.

The late lord of Etherwold was a noble of extreme severe disposition, but still of unblemished honor; the death of an only and dearly beloved son, heir to his rank and riches, had deeply dwelt on the mind of the stern and proud Baron, and not even the gentle and submissive behaviour of his only remaining child, could sometimes soften the growing ansterity of his manners. After the death of his parents, illustrious for their noble virtues as well as the grandeur of their rank, the magnificent possessions of her great progenitors, were vested solely in the person of the lady Elvina Etherwold, who was the only living child of the late Baron, and in whom alone the baronial titles, as well as the demesne were invested. The castle was of immense extent and evidently built for purposes of greater import than an old English noble's residence; its high raised towers and heavy overhanging battlements conveyed an idea of a place at once designed for a fortress and a prison.

The naturally strong situation of the building, rendered it secure against the attacks of any sudden invader, and now that all England was in arms, and fathers, sons and brothers, had enlisted themselves beneath the banners of a bloody civil war, this castle like many others, was armed for the security of its lord in case of danger. It was supposed that at her lord's request, the Countess had retired



from court to avoid the consequences of those cruel and dreadful contentions that had already begun to agitate the minds of men. The Countess was still in the prime of life, and her beauty unrivalled by the fairest dames of the British court; but even the unblemished honour of her character and conduct could not shield her from the busy tongues of blasting calumny, or stay the unfounded suspicions of her zealous lord.

Accompanied by her train and the eldest son of the Baron, with his brother, the heir of Etherwold, she quitted the splendour of the royal palace, and arrived at the confines of the forest of St. Moreton, whose trackless and long unbeaten roads had led her outriders astray, and been the means of introducing to her presence in so strange and singular a manner a being she had long mourned as dead.

The young lord Harrold of Wilden, eldest son of the Baron by his former lady, had arrived at the age of adolescence, this heart naturally bad and inclined to evil deeds became hardened, and in his youthful days betrayed traits of a proud vindictive and ambitious spirit, the imbibed dangerous notions of the greatness of his birth and his infinite superiority over those less nobly born, and being surrounded only by a set of dishonest fawning sycophants and flatterers, he became at once an object of future dread to those who were unhappy enough to excite either his regard or hatred, and the conduct of his boyhood plainly displayed the evils that would accompany his maturity.

The illustrious Elvina, had sometimes argued with him in the mildest terms, but Harrold scarcely restraining the unjust dislike he had ever conceived for the Countess from terms of open expression, haughtily reminded her that over him she had no title to exert the least authority or controul. The Countess was alas, too soon

fatally convinced how fruitless and unprofitable were her efforts, and she found that the mind of Harrold had unfortunately received that unhappy bias, whose dangerous tenets had taken too deep root to hope for the slightest amendment, she therefore confined herself solely to the instruction of Alfred, whose mind and heart (fortunately the very reverse of his haughty brother's) easily and pliantly submitted to her every wish. Between the ages of the brothers, there was a difference of four or five years. As Alfred grew older, his mind appeared to have imbibed a love for deep reflection, whilst the goodness of his heart, the uncommon beauty of his person, and the mildness and sweetness of his disposition, rendered him loved by all; whilst Harrold's overbearing, haughty, cruel and tyrannic temper excited dislike, disgust and fear.

Two beings of such opposite dispositions could have no relish for the society of each other, whilst in the heart of Harrold a deep but concealed aversion had long been smothered. He despised and hated Alfred, nor could his mildness and forbearing good nature remove or conquer the bitter animosity of Harrold.

Alfred had made many attempts to win his affection, but had been constantly repulsed by his brother. Alfred was the heir of the demesne of Etherwold in right of the Countess, his mother, he never assumed to himself that superiority which his birth and greater inheritance entitled him too. The cause of his want of affection and aversion to the youthful Alfred cannot be so well explained as in his own words; For after leaving the presence of the Baron (whom alone he feared to offend, and whose will only could keep his violent temper within bounds) with well-dissembled love towards his brother; he would rush furiously to his own apartments, and in the rage of his distempered passion, utter some dark and dreadful threats against the unoffending object, who had been unknowingly the cause of many a degradation.

"My curses wither the hated intruder," he would exclaim aloud "Oh, that I could annihilate the viper that thus crawls before me at every turn, he possesses his father's affection, his hated mother's riches.—What! shall a puny, whining boy, a stripling, a younger brother lord it over Harrold,—what! shall he inherit these proud and lofty towers, shall he enjoy the vast and inexhaustible wealth of Etherwold—whilst only the petty and sterile barony of Wilden remains to me? never!—sooner would I stab him to the heart and doom my own soul to eternal perdition by the accursed act, than he shall lord it over Harrold—than the brave peasantry shall call him master;—The thought alone is horror, the reality would be madness.

This fortunate brother was undisputed heir to the illustrious titles and domains of Etherwold. A possession that Harrold's ambitious soul had yearned for and aspired too from his infancy; but his cunning taught him the necessity of disguising his aversion and its cause, and guilt made him cautious, secret and wary; the hatred that he felt for Alfred, was the disregard and open disapprobation with which he was considered by the vassals and retainers of Etherwold.

Several years glided imperceptibly away at the castle, and these two noble youths grew up towards manhood, in all the various exercises suited to the instructions of that age of barbarism and bloodshed. Each had a strong desire for martial enterprise and warlike glory; and Harrold, who, as being considerably older than Alfred, had reached his years of emancipation from adolescence, had given ample proof of the restless hardihood of his ambitious spirit.

Alfred rose gradually to the perfection of every manly virtue, and the practice of those honourable pursuits that marked his character; the delight of his adoring mother, and the favorite of all his numerous tenantry and vassals.

The person of Harrold was large and muscular, but well proportioned; his features were dark and expressively handsome, but his black eye-brows were ever knit with a frowning harshness; whilst the mild, open, fine formed countenance and pleasing conciliatory manners of Alfred, rendered obedience a task light and easy to his grateful and adoring attendants. Such were the different characters of these young brothers of a noble house, and as they arrived to the

age of manhood, Alfred though he vainly tried to succeed in allaying the growing enmity, which, with pain, he beheld in his brother Harrold, was too generous to disclose the many proofs of the deceptive cruelty he in secret bore from him, whose mind was plainly filled with a settled, deep and unconquerable hatred which no effort could remove. Often indeed had Harrold in the presence of the Baron, assumed a shew of regard for his brother, and deceived him with the vain hope that his stern, proud heart relented, and that he should enjoy a friend in him. But he soon discovered his hopes were futile.

CHAPTER IV.

A SPACE of some years had passed since the arrival of Sir Godfrey at the Abbey. The beautiful and amiable Bertha had at this period arrived at the age of sixteen. Her form was delicately proportioned and her chief amusement was to wander through the woods, exploring fresh scenes.

The good old Adam Blake, and his wife were often honoured by a visit from their mistress, and seating herself by the cheerful and brisk wood fire, listen attentively to the talkative Mabel's terrible narratives, and spectres and supernatural appearances. The tales of Mabel were terrific and horrifying in the extreme, and mostly ended with the history of the old Baron and Agatha.

The story had made a deep impression upon Bertha, and having often wished for a true account of what really was the end of that unfortunate nun, she had repeatedly entreated Sir Godfrey's permission to search among the ruins, in hopes that some discoveries might be made, that would lead to a development of her death. One evening she in a playful humour declared to Sir Godfrey her intention of examining the ruins.

Sir Godfrey starting at the idea, he asked "have you courage my dear Bertha for such an undertaking?"

"Dear Father" replied she, "are you serious in suspecting me of want of courage, or, rather let me ask, do you think it will be put to the test by terrible spectres that busy fame reports, have so long haunted the Abbey?"

Sir Godfrey turned pale, became much agitated, and with a solemnity that Bertha thought unnecessary, forbade her ever again to renew the subject.

"Mistake me not," said he "I mean not to inspire in your mind a groundless apprehension; but on this subject I am silent, let it as you regard my peace, be never more renewed."

As she retired, she reflected that his words implied, if not exactly, a belief in supernatural beings, at least a doubt of their now existence.

But as her enterprise could not be so well performed alone, she made Ruth her confidant, who readily promised obedience, though not without an inward reluctance.

Adam as soon as dinner was over, brought in the keys of all the entrances to the ruins; and Bertha calling Ruth, for her promised attendance, the latter,

trembling, prepared to follow. Her courage indeed was now put to the proof, for she saw her lady was resolute in her design; but her affection prevailed and she determined to accompany her lady, though she hastened up to her own chamber that she might arm herself with an Ave Marie against the incantations of the troubled ground she was about to visit.

Bertha as she entered the hall from the grand saloon, was surprised to find all the servants and retainers assembled there, with faces distorted with fear and wonder; foremost of the throng stood Mabel, in whose countenance was displayed a degree of fear and doubt, that seemed to express her apprehension for the sound sense of her young mistress, for after having performed her well meaning unpolished obeisance, she stepped a few paces from her companions, and placing herself in an attitude that seemed to demand attention, she thus with great eagerness began:—

Surely, my dear young lady, some evil being has inspired you with this unaccountable whim of visiting the frightful old ruins. Does your ladyship forget all the tales and terrible accounts of apparitions that I have so often warned you against.

Here Bertha could not refrain from a smile, which the whimsical gesticulations and distortion of countenance that Mabel in her eagerness to excite attention, had thrown on her aged features, caused.

Ah, well, I see you will not believe me my lady, so pray Mr. Oswell, declare you what it was you beheld last night that caused you so much alarm.

Bertha smiled but was not at all intimidated. "Good Oswell," said she "pray be speedy in your narration, or you will oblige me to postpone my intended visit till to-morrow."

"Alack, alas, and well-a-day, so please you my lady, I can't tell how it was; but, somehow or other last night, as the moon was shining very bright, I could not help looking at it from my casement window before I went to rest; so my thoughts just then being employed in thinking about past times, when my lord used to live a very different kind of a life to his present, it occurred to me that just under that bright star, (you know the north star my lady) well just under that same star, or near to that way, was his lordship's former residence; ay, and many a good dance my lady have I had in bonny old Stuart Castle hall. But alack, alas, and well-a-day, I can't help reflecting upon the sad and melancholy life we lead now, to which we did then. Well just as the old turret clock struck twelve, I by chance turned my eyes into the south corner of the ruins as I was closing my casement, (for you must understand my chamber window looks full among the old parts) when alack and alas, (heaven pardon my sins) but there as sure as I breathe, I saw a tall figure glide among the cloisters and then suddenly vanish in a terrible vapour of flame and sulphur. Mercy upon me—my knees knock together—my teeth chatter in my head as if I had a tertian Ague, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth to think of it even now."

"Bertha felt a slight alarin across her thoughts, but not choosing her attendants to perceive it," she replied "your fears my good Oswell, it is very clear, have deceived you; and the idle and superstitious tales of the old Abbey, together with the lateness of the hour, made you fancy, what could only be the imaginary delusions of a terrified mind.

"Alack alas, and well-a-day" said Oswell evidently piqued at the observation of Bertha, "I am, so please you my lady quite positive and certain of what I saw;—I had not been so much as even thinking of the ghosts at the time, and the moon shone so bright, that I saw the spectre as it passed along beneath my window, it was the ghost of the nun, poor murdered sister Agatha, and I watched it till it disappeared."

"Why then" replied Bertha, "since you were so near did you not speak to it—and question it as to the cause of its appearance, for perhaps it was nothing more after all, than some unfortunate and benighted traveller who had climbed over the battlements in hopes of obtaining a shelter in the Abbey during the night."

“Me speak to a ghost! my lady,” interrupted the terrified Oswell in trembling haste, “the holy St. Thomas guard me from such a conference and from their most horrible clutches. Why lord my lady, how can you be so hardy as to pretend (pardon an old servant’s freedom) to disbelieve such things; Ah, if your ladyship had ever been at the shrine of the tomb of St. Thomas à Becket, and seen the wonderful miracles wrought there, you would not be so difficult to convince. Heaven and all good angels guard and be with you, I pray that no dreadful judgment may unexpectedly visit you and fall upon you for this irreverent obstinacy.”

Bertha could not again refrain from another smile, and dame Mabel (equal with Oswell in her belief of supernatural appearances) seizing this pause in Oswell’s speech as a fair opportunity, thus concluded his unfinished sentence; besides my lady Bertha, how should it be possible that any human being could scale the great high walls, when my lord your father has had every breach mended, and every gate and gap securely and strongly closed up. No, no, it was no living creature—nor the spirit of sister Agatha, but the wicked old Baron that Oswell saw; your ladyship knows very well, that his ghost walks in the ruins every night, the moment the clock strikes the hour of midnight.

“My good Mabel, according to your account he does,” replied Bertha, “but the reality of his so doing I am not only still inclined to question, but doubt entirely, and as far as examination will allow, I am resolved on being convinced; good Adam proceed if you please without further delay to unfasten the entrance door that leads to the great Abbey church.”

“Since your ladyship is not to be dissuaded from seeing the ruins,” said Adam “which indeed spite of all their terrors, are well worthy viewing, I will do as you command me. But my dear young lady, I entreat you be not too daring and venturesome, for though I do not approve of the nation of spectres and such like absurd and ridiculous fantasies, yet, it is as well to take a proper precaution against danger, therefore I advise, that Mr. Oswell should attend you in your walk; the grounds are overgrown with weeds and broken pieces of ruins, and he will be able in case of need to defend your ladyship if you will grant him that honour.”

Hey, friend Oswell, what say’st thou, turning to the latter whose pale terror stricken countenance and evident confusion seemed to be enjoyed by the old steward; for poor Oswell, little thinking what a severe punishment his love of the marvellous would draw upon him, and being naturally a coward, did but ill accord with this malicious turn of the stewards, who thought it but a fair rebuke for the fears he had helped to implant in the minds of the whole household.

Oswell’s countenance suddenly fell, he cast his eyes upon Adam with no slight degree of dissatisfaction, then fixed them with a look of fear and entreaty on the lady Bertha, in hopes that she might not accept the proposal of the mischievous old steward.

Bertha knew the particular failings in Oswell’s temper, and could not bear to give a moment’s pain in exacting a repugnant obedience to what she considered the gratification of a whim that might prove painful to another, whatever it did to herself, and to the great joy of Oswell, she declined his unwilling attendance, saying, that as it was yet early in the evening, she was devoid of all fear for personal safety, and being so near the Abbey, should there be any appearance of danger, ample protection might be easily obtained.

At this moment Ruth made her appearance from the gallery, and having fortunately been absent during the long parley, Bertha commanded the others present to be silent on the subject of their fears and apprehensions. Adam approaching the doors with some difficulty, unbolted them; and they were no sooner thrown open than a view of the gloomy and dark vaulted passages was distinguished, at sight of which the whole of the vassals run affrighted from the hall.

At first the Lady Bertha felt a little palpitation, and something like fear

stole over her senses as she caught a view of the dismal and dreary looking interior ; but youthful curiosity very soon dispelled these unpleasant sensations.

Poor old Adam, the steward, felt a little ashamed for himself and his followers as he eyed his young lady, and beheld not a trace of fear depicted upon her countenance. Bertha, considering his advanced years, now, out of a kindly feeling, declined his further attendance, and would thus have dismissed him, but Adam, old as he was, feeling thus both his services and gallantry called upon, determined to accompany his lady to the church and cloisters, and therefore preceding Bertha down the passage, which was feebly lit by a distant window, they arrived at the last door, which opened into the great church. Ruth, with increasing dread, clung to the side of her lady, as the folding doors opened on their grating hinges, with a loud harsh noise, echoed through the church, that startled for a moment the little party.

When they descended the steps to the marble pavement of the church, and Bertha with amazement beheld its ponderous massy pillars and high raised windows, the scene to Bertha was new and wonderful ; but the silent and awful gloom of the place excited in her mind mingled sensations which she had never before experienced. At the extreme end of the middle aisle stood the holy table ; it now remained a mere skeleton of departed greatness.

CHAPTER V.

One evening, when all were assembled in the great hall, round a blazing fire, save Adam Blake, who, as steward, was occupied in arranging his accounts in his own room, Dame Mabel, who never was so happy as when relating tales of the marvellous, proposed, as their lord and young lady were busily occupied in the old oak parlour, and Adam was too busy to interrupt them, to relate a legend of former times very horrible, but true, told to her by her mother, who had heard it related by her mother's mother scores of times.

The domestics huddled themselves together in awful anticipation—poor old Oswell using his common exclamation “ alack and alas and well-a-day,” and his face looking as pale as a sheet even before the tale commenced, drew his chair closer to the fire, and seated himself between Ruth and Phoebe in anxious expectation. All being silent and attentive Mabel began ;—

THE LEGEND.

“ You must know that, in the twelfth century, there lived in the north of Germany, a very wicked and cruel Baron, dreaded by his equals on account of his well-known prowess in arms ; feared from his daring deeds by his vassals, and detested and abhorred by the whole principality. His cruelty was only equalled by his ambition ; his insatiate thirst for gold induced him to commit the most detestable crimes. His elder brother, who stood in the way of his inheritance to the barony, had, on attaining his majority, suddenly disappeared, and dark rumours were spread abroad that he met his death by his brother's hand. Upon his accession to the title and the domain, his pride, cruelty, and ambition knew no bounds. One night, sitting in his library, counting his ill-gotten gains, and brooding over his stores of gold, he exclaimed, “ I have heard of spirits ; could I have obtained an interview with one of them,

I might, by this time, have revelled in mines of wealth. 'Tis said that there is at this moment an immense treasure buried near the ruins of the old castle, near mine; might I not become possessed of it; why should I not? Let me see if I can remember how the old legion runs, and under the care of what demon spirit it used to be." He buried his face in his hands, and tried to remember every particular that he had heard concerning it. After considerable doubts and fears his mind was firmly bent upon attempting an interview with the fiend. It was fast verging towards midnight as he began ascending the mountain leading to the castle ruins. The town was still as death, not even the last chorus of a student's convivial meeting broke upon his ear, nor was there a solitary wanderer to watch his footsteps as he cautiously and stealthily trod along the road. Daring and ambitious as he was, the stillness considerably damped his courage, and he felt half inclined to retrace his steps, but the demon of his soul, gold, was too prominent for any better feeling to give place to avarice, and in desperation he pursued his way. An awful silence reigned around; there was not a breath of wind to move the overhanging boughs, or even to cause the slightest rustling of their leaves; nothing was heard but the sound of his own footsteps. He tried every now and then to hum a verse of some favourite air, but failing in the attempt, it rather increased than diminished his fears, and he left off in despair. As he reached one of the terraces he paused, and gazed for a short time upon the scene before him. The moon had just emerged from behind a cloud, showing every thing almost as clear as at noon-day: near at his feet was Heidelberg, looking like an unpopulated and deserted city; in the distance were the frowning and dismal Hartz Mountains, and on his right hand were the river and the valley of the Neckar, intensely beautiful as he would at any other time have thought this view, he turned from it with a troubled mind, and began in depressed spirits to ascend farther the mountain height, until he reached the spot he had fixed upon. It was close by the immense tower which the deadly art of man, and not the course of time, had rent in twain; and which, though divided, still stands upright in defiance of its destroyers. The moon shone through the chasm, showing the massy thickness of the walls, and the immense disjointed body, threatening every instant to fall and crush him beneath it. He threw down the implements for digging, which he had brought with him, and commenced drawing a circle, into which he stepped, and then began the recitations and workings of the spell, which he had read, would raise the fiend to point out to him where the treasure lay concealed. At this moment a dense thick cloud travelled across the moon, leaving all, save the circle which the Baron had drawn, in perfect darkness, which was irradiated by his having placed the lantern he bore in its centre. His terror (spite of his hardy daring,) momentarily increased, so that he could hardly utter. The cloud passed away, and he looked up to see what effect had been produced by the working of his diabolical incantation, when he beheld standing without the circle, the figure of a man clothed in a huntsman's dress, but black as the blackest sable; he was leaning on a long javelin of the same colour as his dress, whilst at his feet crouched a large black dog, of a breed used centuries before for hunting.

The huntsman fixed a stern and piercing gaze upon the Baron, who quailed beneath it. A thousand voices, as if in mockery, uttered shouts of unearthly laughter, till they appeared to die away in the distance. The huntsman then broke his silence in an awful tone, but moved not from his first position.

“Why am I,” said he, “after the lapse of years that I have been suffered to remain undisturbed, again dragged forth by potent spells, to which, however, against my inclination, I must yield obedience: I thought that I should have now been suffered to remain in peace, and that I should have been rid of such as you for ever. Mortal! who dares to intrude thus upon my privacy, what wouldst thou with me?—speak and be brief—was it but to satisfy your idle curiosity that I am here?—if so, rash fool, you are in my power, and shall most dearly pay for your temerity.”

The Baron now began to assume his usual haughty bearing:—“Whate’er thou art, huntsman or demon,” replied he, “hear me: it was not idle curiosity brought me here at this lone hour of night; but I came to seek the treasure of the tower, and by my spell wished to raise some token to show me where it was deposited.”

“What! you covet riches,” replied the huntsman, changing his position, and looking at his large black dog; which at that moment rose from the ground, ‘To your duty, sirrah.’ The hound gave a loud bay, and began slowly walking around the circle, which having thrice performed, he stopped and began scratching the earth.

“Dig there, my Lord Baron,” cried the huntsman with a demoniac grin.

The Baron essayed as he was directed; the earth was soft, and gave way without the least effort: the pick-axe struck against an immense chest—one more blow, and the lid flew open, and to his admiring gaze, exhibited gold coin of enormous size, with which it was filled.

“Thanks, thanks,” exclaimed the Baron; “the utmost I have ever wished is now in my possession; this will make me truly happy.”

“Are you now content,” cried the huntsman.

“I am,” he replied.

“And this, you say, is the summit of your wishes?”

“It is.”

“Of course you will not then object to the price.”

“The price, no; though it were to murder all mankind and sacrifice my own soul.”

“’Tis well,” replied the huntsman; “as to your soul, ’tis mine already; the moment you began your hellish incantation it was mine—I must have blood.”

“Be it so,” exclaimed he in desperation, “sooner than part with gold—gold which is more precious in my sight than the lives of ten thousand.”

“I must have the blood of thy wife.”

“My wife?”

“Ay; do you hesitate?”

“No—’tis done—she dies—ever on the anniversary of this day a fresh victim must be supplied. Obey me, and you live. Fail not, and at the hour of twelve, on the appointed night, you will see me again—remember.”



“The figure was gone before the Baron could reply. Night after night did he visit the spot, and remove his ill-gotten treasure. In the meantime his young and beautiful wife fell (by poison) a victim to his avarice. Several years passed, and the monster failed not to fulfil his contract.

At length, feared and hated by all, rich and powerful as he was, not even the poorest peasant would wed with him. The anniversary of the dreaded day arrived. Night came on with rapid pace, and the Baron strode up and down his princely hall in despair and horror. The bell struck the hour of midnight; loud yells of laughter re-echoed through the building; the terrified domestics fled in every direction.

The huntsman appeared before the Baron in all his demoniac horrors. “Mercy! mercy!” exclaimed he in all the agony of terror. His words were echoed by a thousand deriding voices.

“Ha—ha—ha,” replied the fiend; “thou art mine here and hereafter, Fool, dost thou think I confer benefits for nought? Away! away.”

At that instant a tremendous explosion was heard; the foundation of the castle was shaken to its centre, and hurled in fragments into the air: sulphurous flames burst forth in every direction, and upon one of the falling turrets were seen the demon Baron struggling with the fiend. His long fingers

grasped the Baron's throat, till having strangled him, he gave a wild laugh, and shouting "mine—mine!" disappeared among the blazing ruins bearing with him the mangled body of the demon Baron. The spot has ever since been shunned by human being, and called "The Devil's Grip."

CHAPTER VI.

THE opening of a distant door echoing through the church, recalled the attention of Bertha; she followed the direction of the sound, and arrived at the postern which Adam Blake had unfastened for her admission to the cloisters.

The sudden return to more perfect light, and the exhalations of the parting sunbeams, had a most welcome effect on the spirits of Bertha, and she soon felt revived by the enlivening change. She thanked Adam Blake for his attendance, who promised to wait at the gate for her return, and with Ruth, proceeded to explore the fresh scenes of wonder and admiration which the ruins presented.

As they continued to proceed from the Abbey, Bertha failed not to enter every nook and arch that crossed her way, sometimes she even ventured up the broken steps of a ruined tower, whose lofty battlements no longer reared their proud heads, but lay extended in the area; and, tempted by the beauty of the evening, she ascended to the first story, and through the heavy arch of the open space; where formerly the fretted jambs of the windows had been placed, she obtained a still better view of the surrounding romantic scenery; it was through this open space she had a full view of the south angle tower, one of whose entire sides had fallen away, and all the upper stories were exposed.

Bertha bade Ruth observe it, and asked if she had courage to enter it.—Ruth shrunk back.

"Indeed, my lady, I never behold that tower," she replied, "but it makes me tremble. It was there, they say, that poor Agatha was confined, and Mabel has so often told me to beware of it, that—I—I hardly dare look at it. Surely, madam, you don't intend to make the trial?"

"If, as you say, that was the prison of Agatha," pointing to the south tower "it is there only I hope to find some documents relative to her fate; I am therefore resolved to proceed. But for you, Ruth, stay where you are; I shall not require a further attendance than your remaining within hearing."

Bertha descended the broken steps, and proceeded towards the tower, whilst Ruth, not daring to advance, stood trembling, entreating her young lady to forego the dangerous enterprize; but Bertha having as yet found nothing to gratify her search, or terrify her from pursuing it, resolved not to yield to the light fears of Ruth; she therefore proceeded, after having obtained the keys

from the latter, and arrived at the full sight of the south tower:—its black and frowning aspect, together with its weak, tottering situation, at first aroused a momentary feeling of terror; but youthful hope encouraged her to venture, and she approached the old gothic door, which, from its rotten appearance, she hoped to have pushed open with ease, but it resisted her, and she was obliged to have recourse to the rusty old keys; after a considerable loss of time, she found one that turned in the lock, and the portal giving way, admitted her into a narrow passage, which gave her a sight of an iron grate that was fixed in the arch of the opposite wall.

To the left she beheld a flight of stairs that led to the upper stories; but these were too weak to admit her ascent in safety to the top; she therefore gave over the design, and turned again to the iron grating. As she caught the first view of the alarming objects within, her mind, unprepared for the sudden shock, endured a momentary suspension, and she fell, nearly fainting, against the wall; the power of calling for aid was gone, and, for a few seconds, she was unable to support herself.

The terrific spectacle that had so powerfully affected Bertha, as she caught a view of the interior of this forlorn ruin, was a deep narrow cell, whose walls were hung with mouldering trappings of black; the only light that was admitted within, proceeded from an iron grate fixed deep in the amazing thickness of the small embrasure of the wall. Around this gloomy place were fixed in all directions the horrific emblems of death; and which ever way the desolate inhabitant of this dreary cell turned, images of horror shocking to nature met the tortured view, in the terrific stare and eyeless sockets of the ghastly skull bones, that hung in grim appalling array. In the middle of the cell, upon a raised pedestal, stood the mouldering relics of a coffin, which had once been covered with a velvet pall, but which now hung in tatters down the sides.

At one corner was a small hillock, that conjecture might form as being once, perhaps, the sad resting-place of the distracted penitent; for that, this was the severe prison of penance and contrition, every superstitious emblem of monkish torture that surrounded the walls plainly bore testimony of; a crucifix and broken hour-glass still remained, covered with dust, upon a small altar, beneath an arched recess, whilst the floor was strewn with skulls and human bones.

Poor Bertha now sincerely regretted her bold attempt; ten thousand melancholy dreads and apprehensions seized her thoughts, with fears never before experienced; this place indeed, she thought, seemed the very spot for cruelty and murder, and here it was but too possible the injured spirit of Agatha might certainly resort. She shuddered at the thought; she almost shrieked as her fancy presented visionary forms; but all around was still.

After the first momentary shock had subsided, Bertha arose, and stood irresolute to proceed in her researches.

“I have surely seen the worst,” she inwardly ruminated, “wherefore then should I now fear to enter, since no sight, more appalling than what I now see, can create greater alarm? Perhaps this was indeed the final end of the unhappy sister;” she added, sighing; alas! poor unfortunate, this too surely

was alike your prison, and the cause of your lingering death. Yet wherefore am I thus anxious to solve the mystery of her destiny? Dare I lift the pall from that horrific spectacle? What if my spirits fail me, and I sink, overcome with dread, in this charnel-house of death, may not my senses forsake me in the trial; or is it not very likely that terror may bereave me of my reason? Shall I enter?" As the last word dropped from her lips, she started, and heard it feebly repeated by an unknown voice, which slowly pronounced, "Enter!"

Bertha trembled, and not exactly aware of her intentions, unfastened the grate, and threw back the rattling massy chains that were hooked on the staples without the cell; the grate opened with ease, and swung on its hinges with little or no resistance; and Bertha, with an imagination distempered, and misled by the hopes of discovering something she came in search of, that would repay her fears, descended the indented declivity, and with trembling steps staggered two or three paces from the grating; but again becoming irresolute, and terrified from her purpose, she stopped.

"Dare I," she faintly ejaculated "dare I raise the mysterious lid of that horrific coffin."

"Dare to do so!" replied a voice, that sounded hollow along the dreaded vault; and Bertha, whose terror now had suspended the faculty of feeling, though not of life, actually moved towards the coffin, as if performing some dreadful rite, that she found she had not power to resist. Impelled with a notion of that superior agency which she dared not disobey, and not exactly sensible of what she did, she fearfully cast aside the lid, which, as she touched, fell crumbling to the ground; and turning aside her head, her hand (over which, as well as herself, she had lost all power) fell mechanically within the coffin; and in her fright she grasped something moist and clammy; at that instant a sudden light illuminated the cell, and, at the same moment a spectral form arose enveloped in a pallid flame of blue, clad in the sacred vestments of a Nun. Shrieking wildly, she rushed from the scene of terror, and precipitating herself through the tower gate, fell fainting into the arms of Ruth; who, pale and terrified, called loudly for aid, as she supported her now insensible lady.

Adam Blake, who had long been impatient at the stay of his mistress, and alarmed for her safety, was hastening down the ruins, when the cries of Ruth assailed his ear, and had arrived at the scene of terror as Bertha began to open her eyes.

Holy Virgin protect thee, Lady!" he exclaimed, as he assisted to recover her; "what has thus terrified thee?—Hast thou seen any thing, or do these pale affrighted looks proceed from some fall, which, unmindful of my caution, may have bruised thy tender form among the hillocks of the ruins?"

"Oh no, good Adam, not so," feebly and wildly ejaculated Bertha; "the tower—the dreadful tower!"

"The tower, say'st thou, my lady?—mercy on me!—Have you been so hardy as to venture into that dismal place?—Dear heart! dear heart! I'll warrant now thou hast seen something.—Where are the keys?"

"I know not, unless they remain still in the gates of the tower," replied Bertha.

“Heaven forbid it, I say!” angrily interrupted Adam; “now were it not that the ruins would be left open all night, I would as soon cut off one of my fingers as go near the forlorn dungeon.”

The old gentleman, however, hastily advanced to the tower, but with evident fear and trepidation in his manner, and not a little angry at the cause that compelled him on an errand so unwelcome.

Bertha, as she gradually recovered, felt a perfect recollection of the late horrid scene; and recalling the awful voice she had heard, she no sooner beheld Adam advance to the place of her late terrors, than with the swiftness of the wind, she darted from the melancholy ruins, totally regardless of the pettish exclamation of Adam, who loudly called on her to wait his arrival; but she stopped not till a heap of rubbish lay widely spread in her path, and obstructed her further progress.

At length the dreary aisles were passed, and Adam fastening the great gothic doors of the church, they arrived once more in the vaulted passage.

The lamps that illuminated the hall, recalled the scattered ideas of Bertha sufficiently to enable her to enjoin Ruth and Adam, on pain of her lasting displeasure, to be secret on the sudden illness she had suffered. Adam, however, bowed in silence his obedience to her commands; but Ruth no sooner entered the hall, and found herself once more in safety, than she related all that had passed, with many exaggerated additions, sufficient to confirm her companions in the certain belief that their young lady had seen the ghost.

Bertha entered the grand saloon; but Sir Godfrey was not there, so she retired immediately to her own apartments.

As soon as she entered her room, she drew from the folds of her robe the relics she had unknowingly grasped from the coffin. On examination, it seemed to be some folded papers; but, in so damp and decaying a condition, as to threaten to drop to pieces with the touch. But Bertha felt too much agitated at present to compose her spirits sufficiently for their minute investigation.

Her mind, ever the seat of peace, content, and harmony, now became agitated and unhappy; a number of unpleasing emotions corroded her heart, and for some time she paced the chamber with a hasty, disordered step. The perturbed state of her spirits being at length exhausted, she became more composed; and resolving to examine the papers, she took them up once more, and drawing her chair close to the table, and retrimming her lamp, she tremblingly cast her eyes over them. The characters were perfectly legible, and easy to decipher; with amazement she read the first line, which was thus expressed:—

“TO THE HEIR OR HEIRESS OF THESE DOMAINS.

‘If curiosity, or some over-ruling chance should hereafter lead any of the house of Brandon to this lonely tower, let them not disregard the advice con-

tained in this paper. Strange as it may seem, the latest inheritor of this Abbey is the being to whom these lines are addressed.

‘ There is a mystery pertaining to these towers, which the slow moving hand of time can alone unfold. The family of Brandon possesses a deadly foe, and impending sorrow awaits its latest representatives. Should the last heirs ever enter this melancholy ruin, this record will remind them to shun the possessors of Neville castle.—The hand that traces these characters is solemnly withheld from explanations; but as thou regardest thy future happiness, so regard thou this secret warning!—Remember should’st thou presume to reveal to any creature existing its contents, thou wilt incur a fate as terrible as unexpected, and render useless this effort to save thee from irrevocable misery, if not death itself!

‘ Beneath the deep foundations of the ruins the recorded mystery of the house of Brandon lies securely buried from all mortal discovery; and only chance, or a merciful providence, can restore it to its rightful owners.—Be cautious! remember my injunction—obey its mandates, so may thou yet escape those terrible evils that threaten, without a remedy, the heirs of these once proud turrets.’ ”

With amazement Bertha perused this incomprehensible paper; she had glanced her eyes over the others, but found them to be the history of Agatha. It was evident that this scroll, from the difference of the vellum and the writing, had no relation whatever to the manuscript of the nun. There was no date prefixed nor the slightest clue apparent to guide her conjectures as to the means by which it had been placed in so extraordinary a situation.

Bertha again perused it, and trembled as she finished this passage—“ To save you from irrevocable misery, if not death itself!”

“ What may this mean?” she fearfully ejaculated; “ what dreadful import is contained in these terrible expressions?—Can it be possible they should appertain to my dear father?”

She again looked at the first line, and her emotions, if possible, became stronger as she read, “ To the heir, or heiress of these domains.”

Bertha was her father’s heir, his only heir; was it probable these awe-inspiring words could be addressed to herself? Conjecture thickened, her thoughts became wild and disordered, and at length a sudden gush of tears relieving the confusion of her ideas, her first design was to fly to Sir Godfrey’s chamber, and unveil the mystery to him, from whom alone she could hope for consolation in her present agitation; but casting accidentally her eyes once more on the paper, she saw another paragraph that she had not at first observed. Eagerly she perused the characters; they were to this effect;—

“ Trifle not with the solemn injunction contained in this warning, but be silent on its contents, as you value the future happiness or misery of your days to come.”

* * * * *

These words arrested her intention, they appeared as if indeed addressed personally to herself, and she shuddered as if convinced they really were so. Her spirits failed her; the late terrors of her mind, and the confused, and even

dreadful import of the manuscript occasioned a faintness that compelled her to suspend all further attempts to elucidate this mysterious paper.

The lateness of the hour, for it was now past midnight, together with the still agitating remembrance of the transactions of the south ruin, impressed her mind with a superstitious dread unfelt before; and hurrying off her dress, she endeavoured to lose the recollection of the foregoing scene in the arms of sleep. But her dreams were alarming and terrific; at one moment she found herself following the corpse of some dear connection, for whose loss she was in extreme grief. But soon she lost sight of this melancholy object, and found herself compelled by a superior power to enter some forlorn and gloomy chambers, which appeared to belong to the south wing of the monastery. As she here awaited, a tall majestic female, whose haughty step and stern countenance seemed to awe her into fear and apprehension, stood before her, and with a dagger in one hand, and a goblet of liquor in the other, bade her, in a voice hollow and dreadful, choose her fate; as she presented, with threatening aspect, the poisoned cup, she raised her dagger, and bade her drink it, for that was the last hour of her existence.

A burst of agony awoke her from these disordered visions, and Bertha found her pillow wet with tears; but she rejoiced that she awoke before the horrid conclusion of her disordered fancy had been accomplished. Sleep soon again lightly weighed on her eyelids, and for a short time she enjoyed undisturbed repose; but before the lark had raised his extolling notes to the heavens, she again awoke, and finding the restlessness of her thoughts would not permit her to sleep, she arose from her couch, and approaching the casement, felt her spirits revive as she inhaled the freshness of the morning air.

Casting her eyes on the table, she beheld again the subject of her last night's agitation, which now being somewhat subsided, she found her mind better able to deliberate on the mystery of their contents. How the papers came in such a place, and by whom deposited, was a conjecture that no mental effort could be certain of; at one moment she felt inclined to think they related to a former lord of the Abbey.

"If it really pertains to my father," she said, "he is implicated in this intricate warning more deeply than myself; and should there be indeed an unknown danger, which this paper may teach him how to avoid, it is my duty to make him acquainted with the contents, and the discovery I have made."

But still those emphatic words, which so peremptorily forbade, whoever was the finder, their revealing the contents of the manuscript, caused her to waver, and again she became irresolute; she considered how infinitely more superior were his prior claims, than the injunctions of a strange unknown warning, whose suspicious contents might contain some dark meaning, which, in the end, would prove dangerous to the peace of Sir Godfrey if suffered to remain unrevealed. This last consideration, with many others of equal weight, at once determined her, and be the evil of whatever nature it might to herself, she resolved to incur it by making Sir Godfrey her confidant of the whole circumstance.

With the papers in her hand, Bertha descended to the saloon, but her father was not there, and she impatiently waited his appearance near an hour, when

Oswell entered to inform his lady, that Sir Godfrey, being rather indisposed, desired her presence in his own apartments.

Bertha hastened to obey, but was shocked at beholding the alteration that had taken place, since the preceding day, in his features and countenance. An unfolded letter lay upon the pillow of the couch, which Bertha conjectured as being the cause of the sudden illness, that with grief she saw too legibly depicted in the whole appearance of Sir Godfrey; she perceived also that his mind was deeply affected, and regardless of her own peace, but only anxious for that of her dear father's, she concealed the paper she had intended for his perusal, thinking at some future period to produce it.

A sealed packet lay upon the table, which Sir Godfrey delivered to Oswell, and dismissed him with it to the Countess of Etherwold; then turning his eyes tenderly on Bertha, he said:—

“My child, I feel that I have too long immured you in the cheerless glooms of these solitary ruins. The kind friend of my happier days has long importuned me for the society of my Bertha. Would you not be happy, my Bertha, to quit for a time, these melancholy recesses, for the brilliant circles that now court your acceptance in a visit to the Countess of Etherwold?”

“When I see my dear father happy, and recovered from his indisposition, I may, under his sanction, take advantage of my lady Etherwold's goodness; but if allowed my choice, believe me, dear father, I can taste no peace whilst absent from you; grant me permission to defer, till some more convenient opportunity, the honour intended me.”

Bertha, as she finished her request, drew her seat near to the couch; and Sir Godfrey seeing she was resolved not to leave him, no longer attempted to oppose her desire. As he viewed her, the tears trickled down his face, which were kissed away by his beautiful daughter, who, taking Sir Godfrey's hand, said, with all the angelic persuasive looks and manner of a ministering cherub—

“My dear father, forgive the questions of your child, if she has too long observed with pain the woes of a parent whom she loves!—May I,” she tremulously added, “not know the source?—Who knows, but perhaps the confidence of your own Bertha would alleviate their inflictions.—Sorrow, when confided in the bosom of affection and duty, loses its sharp envenomed poignancy.—Ah! then unfold to your child this overwhelming, this mysterious cause of affliction. My father, you may trust your child—indeed—indeed you may!”

Sir Godfrey appeared evidently moved;—some deep inward feelings struggled in the breast of Sir Godfrey, who laying his hand on his heart, as if to restrain the labouring secret, said:—

“O God!—Oh my child! sole pledge of an adored wife, how trying is the anguish of this bitter moment!—I must not, great God of justice! dare not reveal the horrid secret!”—A kind of solemn horror, accompanied with looks of wildness, darkened the fine expressive features of Sir Godfrey, as he thus continued.—“An oath, the most binding, forces me to a hateful silence. Seek not, therefore, as you regard my peace of conscience as well as mind, to draw from me a forbidden confidence!—Alas! poor innocent, I would preserve thee from a similar fate; for already I foresee there are woes in store that will but



too severely afflict thy susceptible nature. Shouldst thou, my Bertha, become acquainted with unknown evils, they can answer no purpose but to involve thee in a labyrinth of sorrow, which no clue but death could unravel. Thou art a blooming flower, my child, too weak for this rude habitation, and fain would I transplant thee to a more congenial clime; but here only thou art safe—in these remote solitudes none will seek for him who once was—What am I about?"

Sir Godfrey suddenly stopped short; Bertha listened with the utmost attention, and for a moment hoped to have gathered something from this unfinished sentence, that might lead her amazed ideas to a train of probabilities; but Sir Godfrey, deeply sighing, only added—

"My Bertha, I feel that I am incoherent, and indeed mysterious; but never question me again. Of this, however, be assured, that while in these gloomy woods we find a home, we have no near evils to dread; yet should thy unconscious footsteps pass the boundaries of this forest, remember the agitation thou hast so often witnessed in me, and when you reflect on their source, think of them as a kind of warning that must instinctively guide thy conduct. I have well observed the temper of thy mind, and rejoice to find it possessed of that

fortitude which will, I hope, preserve thee from the enervating tyranny of those ungovernable feelings. I feel myself exhausted, and wish for repose;—retire, my love, and in the evening we will again renew our usual occupations.”

CHAPTER VI.

DEEPLY musing on her father's words, Bertha retired for the rest of the time to the forest, where she pondered on each sentence he had uttered; but she found the more she attempted to give the semblance of truth to the vague conjectures of fancy, the farther she involved herself in an inextricable labyrinth of doubt and uncertainty; she therefore gave over the useless research; but one or two expressions that fell from Sir Godfrey's lips, seemed to throw a faint light on the extraordinary occurrence of the former evening. Was it possible, she thought, that her father was acquainted with the mysterious paper; or, if so, for what inscrutable purpose had he taken so alarming a method of cautioning her against unknown danger, as to hinder him from explaining openly what she had found so mysteriously?

Some part of Sir Godfrey's speech seemed connected with the paper, and she now tried to conjoin the sense of each in such a meaning, as to place beyond doubt her conjectures of the truth. She remembered he had laid great stress on the word, “warning;” and she now, on this review, felt almost convinced of the certainty of her surmises.

In pensive ruminations she passed along, unheeding the hours, till she found herself in a gloomy unfrequented avenue she had never before remembered to have seen. She looked around to discover some brake or footpath, but none appearing, she resolved to regain, if possible, the intricate maze she had passed.

Turning to retrace her path, she was alarmed by the sounds of strange voices, and saw at no great distance two tall figures, cloathed with long folding cloaks, pass down the avenue, who by the earnestness of their conversation, seemed not to have noticed her.

Dreading some unknown danger, she hastily sprung through an adjoining glade, and concealing herself behind an embowing thicket, remained in breathless suspense till they should have departed.

As they approached near her hiding-place, their converse was too loud to remain unheard; and Bertha, whom fear and curiosity made attentive, caught some of their extraordinary words, as they slowly passed along.

“ But surely, my lord,” exclaimed a harsh voice, “ wealth and honours are amply in your power, in an union with the heiress of Neville.”

“ Heavens ! do my senses not deceive me ?” tremblingly ejaculated Bertha.”

A full-toned voice, replying in answer to his companion, said—

“ The haughty Alice scorns my advances ; and thou knowest my soul is devoted to the too charming unknown forestress.”

“ It is evident, my lord, from her situation,” replied the other, “ she would think herself honoured, and gladly accept the terms of the Baron of Wilden ; nor need she prevent the long designed union between you and the lady Alice.”

“ Mention her no more,” replied the former voice in a tone of anger ; “ she has cast her eyes on the bastard of Etherwold, and all my efforts to procure a smile, she treats with silent scorn and contempt. But vengeance—” Here a gust of wind carried away the succeeding words, and Bertha was unable to distinguish the conclusion ; but in an another instant she heard—“ The eastern towers will suit our purpose well ; the idle reports of spectres render our operations secure from discovery and intrusion.”

“ Is then your lordship resolved ? Can no other alternative than blood give you possession of your wishes ?”

“ None ;—has he not provoked my vengeance, and foiled me in every wish of my heart ? Has he not blasted my golden harvests, and crushed my infant love ere it had time to blossom ? By the Eternal, my soul loathes the serpent’s sight not more than his ! Thinkest thou weak and futile ties of blood shall restrain my just revenge ? Hast thou yet to learn how immoveable are my decrees, when once determined on ? But of this enough at present. He shall enjoy his fancied triumph. Let us learn the seeming semblance of a fair outside, and lull him to his ruin by our dissembled show of friendship and goodwill. As yet my project is but green in ripeness. Prepare thou as I command thee, and at our next meeting I will speak further on this business.”

The voices now sunk into distance, and the terrified Bertha ventured from her concealment. She had, through the interstices of the boughs of the trees, obtained a slight view of their persons ; the one nearest, seemed tall and majestic of stature and deportment ; and the side glance she had been enabled to obtain of his features, displayed a noble, fine, dark countenance, though his cloak and the feathers of his hat so much disguised it, that she had only a partial view.

The lovely Bertha, educated in seclusion and retirement, shuddered as her ears were involuntarily pierced with sounds so new to her. Terrified for her own safety, she hurried down the avenue at the very moment that the quick bounding of an animal’s feet was heard in the hollow woods, and in an instant she beheld her favourite little fawn, which, rushing, affrighted and panting down the path, sprung into the arms of Bertha, and, by the piteous glances that shot from its eyes, seemed to entreat protection from the furious pursuit of a boar, which Bertha saw darting in savage eagerness upon his helpless prey. Her own safety now became endangered, for the savage beast rushed madly on his spoil, and had nearly reached the spot she stood upon, when at that

instant a young stranger, with his hunting spear, rescued Bertha from impending destruction. He saw the danger of Bertha, and with a swift motion winged his barbed arrow to its destined aim; it entered the side of the enraged and hungry monster, and laid him prostrate on the earth.

Bertha, in the pure joy of her feelings, fell on her knees before the stranger, in whose fine, open, manly form and countenance she was pleased to recognize neither of the two beings she had so lately seen.

The gallant stranger, as he hastened to raise the object of his care, viewed her with evident marks of admiration, whilst the beautiful Bertha, unconscious of the influence of her native perfections, returned, in a strain of artless language, her thanks for his timely aid.

“Heavens and earth!” cried the stranger, charmed as much with the melting harmony of her voice and manner, as by the uncommon loveliness of her face and person, “whence could such matchless beauties spring, and where so long remain concealed?”

Bertha, confused and disconcerted by the ardent gaze and language of the stranger, averted her eyes, and with a modest dignity, said—

“Brandon Abbey is the residence of my father. Allow me, courteous stranger, to conduct you to his presence; he will, I am sure, joyfully acknowledge the service your timely arm has so generously performed for his daughter.”

“I have then the happiness to behold, for the first time, the lady Bertha Brandon. Our parents, charming lady, once lived in the reciprocal bonds of friendship. Surely Sir Godfrey, will not longer refuse his lovely daughter to the entreaties of the Baroness of Etherwold.”

From the noble appearance and dignified deportment of the stranger, as well as the latter part of his speech, she was assured this was certainly one of the Baron’s sons. From what cause she knew not, but she evidently felt her cheeks crimson, and her tongue unable to perform its functions. The stranger perceived the ardent gaze of his eyes was painful to the lovely girl; and though they were fixed in wonder and admiration on her countenance, yet delicacy forbade the indulgence of his too fascinated sight, and with respectful consideration he restrained himself, though with great difficulty, from a too apparent pleasure.

Bertha felt relieved, and soon recovered her native ease; she kindly patted her little favourite, which she still retained in her arms; whilst the stranger, lost in amazement, appeared to be deeply ruminating on the late occurrences.

Bertha too had experienced a variety of emotions on this occasion; she scarcely reflected on the danger she had escaped, but her thoughts were bent on him who had been her preserver. She had once slightly cast her eyes on his face, and there beheld an assemblage of manly beauties that forcibly interested her remarks and attention, and they led to this innocent and inward apostrophe:—

Bertha had heard a description of the different characters and disposition of the brothers of Etherwold; but feeling very little interest on the merits of either, had paid but slight attention to the account, although she now remembered sufficient to think on the contrast that existed between them.

Thus mentally reserved, they reached the Abbey ere their inward reflections were finished, where stood Sir Godfrey, who, with surprise and scrutiny, beheld

the companion of Bertha; the latter, gracefully presenting her deliverer to her father, recited in animated language, the dangers from which he had rescued her. Sir Godfrey listened with alarm to the narrow escape she had so fortunately effected, and with delighted joy pressed his Bertha to his heart; then turning to the stranger, and warmly taking his hand, he said—

“Brave young Sir, accept a parent’s thanks. The pleasure of this moment renders cold all language; but the heart speaks for itself, nor will these tears of gratitude be restrained. My Bertha must also learn to express her acknowledgments; for in saving her’s, you have preserved the life of her father.”

“My Lord,” replied the youth, “you over-rate my trifling service. To succour undefended innocence, is the best and greatest privilege of manhood; and happy shall I esteem myself, if the events of this evening should have afforded me the real felicity of rendering the smallest aid to the daughter of Sir Godfrey Brandon. I shall be greatly repaid, if allowed hereafter to claim the honour of his friendship, and sometimes the pleasure of his society.”

He bowed low, and finishing this sentence, was retiring, when Sir Godfrey, as much by his looks as his words, expressing his thanks, said—

“If I be not deceived, it is to my Lord Alfred that I am indebted for the signal service he has so generously exerted in my child’s defence. Most honoured, must I ever esteem myself in the favour of his visits.

Lord Alfred with modest diffidence, replied—“Thus permitted to renew my fortunate acquaintance, I shall I fear, my Lord, become too often an intruder.”

He said no more, but casting a speaking glance on the attentive Bertha, gracefully took his leave, and bent his way through the thickest mazes of the woods.

Bertha watched his receding form, till the deep foliage of the trees closed him from her sight. Unconsciously a sigh escaped her bosom. Shut from all society but the inmates of the Abbey, the fine person and noble countenance of Alfred had left a soft impression on her memory, that made her for a moment regret the secluded life she had never till this hour thought of but with indifference.

Retired to the privacy of her own chamber, she eagerly began to review the many uncommon occurrences of the preceding day. The gloomy tower, and the scene there witnessed; the unfathomable mystery of her father’s life, and lastly, the events of this evening, all crowded on her tumultuous thoughts, and each demanded a separate notice. Who could be the strangers that, with such threatening aspects and dreadful expression, had mentioned secrets evidently designed for no third hearing. The heiress of Neville was mentioned.

Bertha started at the recollection of the name, and hastily approaching the table, drew forth the papers, and again eagerly perused them. The names were alike beyond the power of misconception or error in their sound and pronunciation; yet, why she should feel dread towards the possessors of Neville castle was a mystery no effort of conjecture could possibly elucidate. But that she might divert her thoughts from this source, since she found it was yet impossible to sleep, Bertha determined to devote the present time, late as it was, to a perusal of the story of the Nun.

The papers she had found in the coffin, relative to the sister, were many of them obscured by mildew; many of the lines were totally extinct and only here and there a few, of the first parcel she began to examine, could be at all distinguished.

Some of the papers were written in a different hand, and apparently served to connect the moving and affecting exclamations of the forlorn sufferer; many of them indeed were entirely lost and destroyed.

At length, in another packet, Bertha discovered a more perfect copy of the preceding ones, which, from the style of its writing, and the date to the other papers, evidently proved them to be the labour of some of the monks of the monastery.

These records being easier to decipher than those which the Nun had left, Bertha laid the latter aside; and retrimming her lamp, and seating herself nearer to the table, she took up the monk's copy, and began, not without infinite difficulty, to read the melancholy story of the Nun of St. Moreton.

THE STORY OF AGATHA.

“It was in the reign of Edward the First, that, in an old dilapidated mansion, depending on the barony of Brandon, lived the poor, but proud Sir Edmund; descended of an illustrious house, whose noble progenitors had, with the Conqueror, settled in England, upon the prodigal establishment of their royal master.

“In the two succeeding centuries, however, great changes had taken place, and many events, not here related, had reduced the once powerful and splendid ancestors of Sir Edmund to little more than a military dependence. The proud nature of the knight shrunk from the consequences of the total ruin of the grandeur of his house; and, indignant at the disgraceful and humiliating change of his circumstances, he hastily quitted the gay triumphs of the British court, because his fallen fortunes and wasted patrimony no longer enabled him to vie in the splendour of his appearance and expenditure with the rest of the nobles of the kingdom. In the gloomy shades of his forsaken mansion, he buried himself from all the joys of social intercourse; nor was his melancholy habitation ever after disturbed by the sounds of festive cheerfulness, or the smile of contentment. Morose in temper, from his disappointments in fortune, and too proud to stoop to such honourable resources as might have in time procured for him the re-establishment of his decayed house, he disdained all pecuniary acquirements, and determined to build his hopes of future greatness on an alliance of his only child with the splendid and noble lord of Cuthbert.

“But the lovely Agatha, brought up in total seclusion, and unacquainted with the manners of the world, happily free from the ambitious and haughty passions of her stern sire, had unconsciously rendered obedience to his commands impossible, and shrunk in horror from the dreaded proposal of an union with lord

Cuthbert; for, alas! she had not a heart to bestow, nor a hand to give away. Agatha, the beautiful Agatha, whose years scarce numbered seventeen, had known the exquisite pains and pleasures of a secret love; and, in the simple innocence of an unsuspecting, unsophisticated mind, had given her heart, her soul, her all to a—*stranger*.

“From earliest infancy she had been abandoned by her father; who, till the destruction of his fortunes compelled him to remember that he had a child, had ceased even to think such a being was in existence: he now, however, resolved to make her subservient to his purposes; and by her projected alliance with lord Cuthbert, restore the ancient grandeur of his house.

“Agatha had never known a mother’s tenderness, or experienced a father’s sheltering protection; the artless dictates of her too susceptible heart were her only guides and monitors; and during the long absence of her sire, her soul first felt the pleasing emotions of love for the unknown but graceful stranger, whom she had first beheld in the shades of the vast forests of St. Moreton’s monastery, where she had often been accustomed to roam at large in search of health and exercise, and where she had first met the fascinating Arnold.

Unacquainted with the world’s deceits, poor Agatha listened to his fervent vows with downcast blushing timidity and pleased acceptance.

With an entire, an artless confidence she owned a mutual love, and with joy anticipated the moment of happiness, when she was to become the bride of him for whom alone life was valuable.

“Each secret meeting more firmly linked her chains; her very soul was devoted to the stranger, whom, as yet, she knew not by any other title than the simple name of Arnold. In a moment fatally destructive to her repose, when love had blinded reason, and the artless character of Agatha but too successfully aided the purposes of the stranger, he obtained not only complete possession of her affections, but of her person also.

“At midnight, in the ruined chapel of Sir Edmund’s gloomy edifice, the stranger had prevailed on the innocent Agatha to meet him, and ratify his wishes. A monk of a distant convent waited in the chapel, and the inauspicious nuptials were performed, and Agatha became a bride, without knowing by what title she must in future call herself.

“Scarcely had three months of happiness and love passed over her head when a storm, dreadful and unexpected, threatened for ever to annihilate the bright prospect of felicity. The sudden arrival of a hasty messenger from the knight alarmed the trembling Agatha; and scarce had she perused the purport of his arrival, than with a faint shriek, and stifled cry of agony, she fell to the ground, and she feebly exclaimed—

“ ‘Lost, undone, and wretched Agatha! destruction and death await thee!’ ”

“Recovered by the tender assiduities of the stranger, she wildly bade him, if still he loved her, to protect and bear her from her stern father’s relentless rage, and her lover’s detested arms. The stranger read the fatal paper that contained the harsh mandate of his Agatha’s father; his brow became contracted, and his countenance overcast with apparent gloom and sorrow, as he

THE HEIRESS, OR THE

perused the unwelcome information of the knight's arrival, on the morrow, at his castle, to celebrate the nuptials of his daughter with the lord of Cuthbert, who accompanied him.

“For sometime a gloomy silence pervaded his lips, and Agatha vainly cast her tearful imploring eyes for succour and protection on the stranger. At length starting from a deep reverie, he caught her in his arms, as she was sinking to the ground, overcome by terror and surprise, and kissing her cold and quivering lips, bade her take comfort, and abide with patience the arrival of her sire; adding, as he reluctantly tore himself from her feeble hold, for Agatha was now nearly insensible, that in three weeks he would return, and openly claim her as his wife, when the mystery that had so long enveloped in secrecy his name and title, should be unravelled, and his adored Agatha be restored to splendour and affluence. Again embracing her, he hurried precipitately from the place, and Agatha—the ruined, hapless Agatha never saw him more!”

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Here many lines became defaced, and Bertha, who felt herself uncommonly interested in the fate of the once lovely Agatha, could not consent to quit its perusal, though the lateness of the time had already been proclaimed by the turret clock of the Abbey, whose melancholy heavy bell had struck the hour of one.

At length, however, she was able to continue as follows:—

“Ferocious rage filled the soul of the gloomy knight, and darkened his features, as prostrate at his feet lay, overwhelmed in grief and tears, the imploring Agatha.

“‘Spare me!’ she cried, ‘Oh sire! spare your wretched child—she cannot marry the lord of Cuthbert!’”

“Fury flashed in the eyes of the stern Sir Edmund, on hearing these words of his daughter; at length the burst of rage found vent; he seized the arm of the trembling Agatha, and placing her hand forcibly in that of lord Cuthbert's, commanded her to prepare herself in three days, to become his bride, or meet the curses of an angry father, and be driven from his sight for ever.

“Driven to despair, and now vainly calling on the mysterious stranger to shield her from the direful fate that awaited her, the hapless Agatha wildly flew to the gloomy wood of cypress, three weeks he had promised to reclaim her; but, alas! they had already expired, no stranger had appeared.—The fourth week of his absence came—it passed away, but he came not;—and now but three days remained between her and her hateful nuptials. Wildly she wandered through the gloomy wood, and vainly cast her eyes in hopeless anguish all around her; no stranger met her sight—he came not to rescue his forlorn bride from the rude grasp of impending misery and destruction.

“Night came on; yet she quitted not the solemn shades of the dreary grove, The bell of midnight sounded; she started at the melancholy toll, and fear and awe possessed her sickening fancy. She hurried through the wood, and reached in silence her chamber, but sleep visited not the wretched maid.

“Again, as the hour of suffering drew still nigher, she threw herself in



supplication before the gloomy knight, and besought him to spare her but one week longer, ere he linked her to misery and woe.

“Meet lord Cuthbert,” cried her ruthless father, as he, with fury darting from his eyes, seized the wretched maid, “meet lord Cuthbert at the altar, ere the sixth hour of the early morrow has chimed upon the bell, or shun for ever the presence of thy offended parent !”

“Poor Agatha shrunk from the angry glances of the enraged knight ; despair and anguish seized her soul. The stranger never came ; Whither could she fly ? How was she to avoid the choice of miseries that equally pursued her ?

“Upon the pillow of her tear-bedewed couch she vainly laid her head to seek a momentary oblivion of her sorrows in repose. Something lay upon the pillow ; she started up, and took her lamp to examine it—it was a paper curiously folded ; —with fearful, trembling expectation she hastily opened the envelope, and read ;—

‘The stranger guards his love ;—and, though unseen, and yet forbidden to reclaim his lovely bride, now watches over her safety, and awaits the precious moment when he shall hasten on the wings of love to restore his Agatha to happiness and liberty. If then she would preserve herself for her unknown friend, let her instantly fly to the sanctuary of St. Moreton’s Monastery, where she may remain in security, till demanded by her adoring

‘ARNOLD.’

“The unhappy maid perused these fatal lines with unsuspecting belief and joyful ecstasy, on the prospect of being restored to the unknown.”

* * * * *

Here again several pages of the manuscript were totally obliterated; only a line here and there, and a half finished sentence remained intelligible, by which it appeared that Agatha, in compliance with the stranger's mysterious warning, had escaped at midnight from her father's mansion, and taken refuge in the cloisters of St. Moreton.—The remaining papers thus went on.

* * * * *

“The haughty Lady Abbess received the forlorn wanderer with cold civility, and suspicious scrutiny. The unfortunate Agatha had, confided to the superior her mournful tale, nor left one circumstance untold that might excite her pity, save her marriage with the stranger.—Another month had glided heavily away at the Abbey in secluded retirement, and yet he came not.”

* * * * *

Here another pause in the affecting narrative prevented the discovery of the succeeding passages; The next paper she was at all able to make out, ran thus;—

* * * / * *

“The knight, with dreadful rage, discovered his daughter's flight; but he vainly sought again to restore her to his power;—he never saw her more, nor knew the sad conclusion of the unhappy Agatha's destiny; who, deceived and terrified by the threats, expostulations, and commands of the Lady Abbess, and the Fathers Confessors of the Monastery, was at length betrayed into her own destruction; for the merciless Abbess threatened to return her to her lord, and to her father, if she longer refused to take the vow of a monastic life.

“Despair and horror now seized the suffering victim of bigotry and paternal tyranny. Another and another month elapsed, and hope no longer would support her—the cruel stranger never came. At the gates of her prison, she was told, waited her father and her rejected lover, with a powerful band to force her from the Abbey into the arms of a hated husband. In a wild agony of terror, she faintly bade them save her from her father's pursuits.

“That instant the sacred, irrevocable vow was administered, and all its binding forms complied with by the lost Agatha; who in her terror of her father, had for a moment forgot her previous engagements with the stranger—forgot that she must, in a little time, become perhaps a wretched mother, and now was a still more wretched Nun.”

* * * * *

Here again the papers were useless, and their lines completely in obscurity; but turning over the sides of some that yet remained whole, she continued to read the following sentences:—

* * * * *

“The Lord of Brandon Abbey was the patron of the monastery of St. Moreton, whose great riches had long been the object of his rapacious wishes. The truly sumptuous style, and princely magnificence of the holy Fathers had given cause of umbrage to the haughty Baron, and raised the censure and speculation

of the surrounding country ; nor were the pretended humility and sanctified solemnity of their outward manners, at all calculated to blind the eye of reason and discernment to the real hypocrisy of their characters.

“ Long continued prosperity, had given to the holy Fathers of St. Moreton a proud superiority over every occurrence in life ; and to the repeated and angry demands of the baron of Brandon, that they should raise for him, as their patron, a subsidy of ten thousand marks, and also acknowledge and pay the homage of vassalage for the lands of the Abbey, which belonged to the domain of the same, given to the Father’s of St. Moreton, as a superstitious expiation of some heinous crimes he was reported to have committed. The Abbot, however, disdained compliance.

“ The Baron, disregarding the vengeance of the church, forced himself within the very gates of the Abbey, and suddenly appearing before the astonished community, he accused the members of the monastery with sacrilege and profanation ; that since he well knew that one or more of the sisters had sullied her vow of sanctity, he would expose the whole community to the world’s derision, nor cease his vengeance till the ruin of the place was accomplished ; concluding with saying, as he indignantly retreated from the portal—

“ Look to it—look to it well ; for, by the tremendous powers above, I swear if, within three hours, you send me not thrice ten thousand marks, your house, and all your shameless revelry and riots, shall undergo the terrible exposure and punishment of your insolence and guilt.’

“ The terror-struck community awhile stood aghast, and trembling with fearful horror for the consequences of the vindictive Baron’s proceedings, hastily dispatched a Monk with ten thousand marks, to the implacable Baron, till the Fathers could search into the truth of his dreaded calumny.

“ He was prevailed upon to suspend his proceedings against the Abbey till the succeeding morrow, whilst the holy sisterhood endured the most persecuting examination from the Lady Abbess. No signs of guilt, however, were found ; and the Fathers rejoicing in their expected security, were debating on an ample defiance to the Baron, when news was brought that sister Agatha had fallen senseless on the steps of the grand altar, and had been removed to her cell. Thither the Abbess instantly hastened ; and as the insensible Nun lay still reclined on her mattress, her outer garment unlaced to admit of respiration, the disfigurement of her person first forcibly struck the holy Mother with suspicion. She started, frowned, then looked again ; conviction flashed upon her eyes, she commanded all to quit the cell, and send instantly the Father Abbot to her.

“ The Father hastily obeyed. The Lady Abbess, in silence, made him a signal to shut the door, and pointing to the still inanimate Nun, she murmured in a hollow voice—

“ Behold the guilty wretch that, with impious sacrilege, hath defiled our holy sanctuary,—Say, holy Father, how must we dispose of the accursed apostate ?”

“ Before the Abbot could reply, the unfortunate Agatha awoke from the counterfeit of death’s repose, and beheld the forms of her inveterate destroyers the Abbot withal exclaimed—

‘What punishment can await that guilty wretch, who defiles our holy order?—Say, lost one of God, art thou not guilty?’

“Sinking on her knees, of every hope in life bereft, the unhappy Agatha feebly exclaimed—

‘I am indeed!—Have mercy, Have mercy, holy Father, on my involuntary crime!’

“She then turned to the frowning Abbess, and piteously added, as she clung around her knees—

‘Spare, Oh gracious Mother, spare a repentant daughter!’

“In the countenances of her judges poor Agatha read her fate; for against the sacred order of the sisterhood she had sinned beyond atonement by any other punishment than death—Vainly then she knelt, and clung to the robe of the Abbess;—she had slandered with sacrilege the purity of God’s anointed house.

“To dispose of the unfortunate nun, was now become an event absolutely necessary to the safety and welfare of the order; the claims of mercy, or the melting pleadings of pity were alike disregarded, she was born by the tormentors from her cell to the dungeon of the south tower.”

Here Bertha, shuddered as the last sentence forcibly struck her; terrific ideas now filled her soul, and she internally exclaimed—

“That horrid dungeon then was, alas! the witness of poor Agatha’s sufferings and death.

“At the hour of midnight they dragged the miserable victim from her cell, and deep, in the horrific dungeons of the prison, plunged the distracted Nun;—no pity alleviated her misery, and in the centre of the place stood the coffin destined for her.

“Two days of lingering sufferings had passed, and the third was nearly closed. Shut from life, and light, the pangs of hunger seized the frantic sufferer, and the perils of premature childbirth writhed her anguished frame.—Shrieks of despair rang through the building, and echoed to the vault of heaven. Hark! inhuman fiends, is mercy dead within you?—And thou too, remorseless betrayer of trusting innocence, hear ye not yon soul-appalling shriek of her thy fatal love has destroyed?—She curses thee, and imprecates Heaven’s just vengeance on thy perjured heart!—Heaven hears the awful appeal—it will avenge thee, suffering maid! Now sink to death appeased.—Again she shrieks—sure it is her last!—The holy sisterhood, appalled, fly wildly from the dreadful tower, but vainly supplicate the mercy of their superiors for its dying inmate.—Nature is exhausted and hark again the groans grow fainter!—Short breathed murmurs proclaim the welcome dissolution of life! poor Agatha is at rest—her voice is heard no more.”

Bertha again shuddered; for now she doubted not that, in bringing away these appalling documents of misery, she had touched the long-forgotten form, whose shrinking dust had once inherited existence and animation, and alas! but too much of sorrow and affliction for a fault so involuntary. But little of the melancholy tale remained to be perused. Bertha, found little to interest her attention, till towards their conclusion the following passage struck her, and she thus proceeded:—

“The vengeance of Heaven hung heavily over the conscience of the wicked

Baron, he tried in the arms of sleep to lose the remembrance of his crimes, and the terrible vengeance they inflicted on his guilty soul.

“The sullen bell had tolled the hour of midnight ere he could compose his mind to repose. On this night, however, unusual restlessness pervaded his frame; at length a kind of unwilling stupor lulled for a moment his tortured spirits, and he slept. Not long did the balmy deity await him;—starting in horror, he wildly raised himself, half-bent, on his couch, and drew aside its draperies. The chamber was in total darkness, and every taper seemed suddenly to have been extinguished (for the Baron of late had never slept without a blaze of light in his chamber.)

“At that moment the heavy bell of the Abbey clock struck one;—he in vain attempted to call his attendants, but speech was denied him,—his blood ran cold to its native source, his hair stood erect, and his countenance was distorted; for, as his eyes turned wildly, he beheld, standing close to the side of his bed, the pale figure of a female form, thinly clothed in the habiliments of a Nun, and bearing in one hand a taper, whilst the other arm supported the ghastly form of a dead infant reclining on her breast. The countenance of the figure was pale, wan, and horrible to behold; for from its motionless eyes no spark of life proceeded, but they were fixed in unmoving terrific expression on the appalled Baron. At length a hollow sounding voice pronounced through the closed lips of the spectre—

‘Oh false, false Arnold! accursed and rejected of thy maker! knowest thou not the shadowy form that stands before thee?—knowest thou not thy wretched bride?—seest thou not the murdered infant thou hast destroyed.—The spirit of Agatha comes to call for vengeance and retribution; for know, the curses of her latest moments, when wreathing beneath the agonies, the torments of death, and devouring hunger, that she then called upon thy head, were heard, and never shalt thou, guilty wretch! enjoy one quiet moment more.—My mangled form, as now thou seest me, and dreams for ever of affright and terror, shall all haunt thy thoughts with horror; nor shall the grave even rescue thee from the tortures I await to inflict—Farewell—farewell till next we meet! In the cypress grove, where first thy perjured soul won on my happy, unsuspecting nature and drew my youthful heart from parental duty and obedience, there shall thou again behold me!’

“Suddenly the eyes of the spectre became animated—Oh! then what flashes of appalling anger darted from their hollow orbits on the horror-struck Arnold; three dreadful shrieks rung pealing through the chamber, now filled with a blaze of sulphureous light;—the spectre suddenly became invisible, and the Baron fell senseless on the couch.”

Here Bertha threw down the papers in fearful expectation of she knew not what; precipitately casting off her dress, she hurried into bed, as the Abbey clock struck three, and covering herself completely with clothes, tried to lose in sleep the dreadful picture her fancy had created; nor was it long before a sweet slumber overtook her agitated spirits, which not even the horrors of the tale could prevent the soft visions of delight from visiting her dreams, in the pleasing form of Alfred.

These sweet delusions of visionary slumbers had held their influence over the

senses of Bertha for some hours after the sun had shed his powerful beams on the earth ; pleased with her dreams, she sprung from her couch with the lightness of unburthened youthful expectation. Her every feature was indeed a rich perfection of irresistible loveliness, that involuntary claimed superior homage and adoration.

Her delighted parent beheld her, as she this morning entered the sitting-room, with emotion of mixed pain and pleasure ; he sighed inwardly as he reflected that this all-fascinating creature might shortly be deprived of her only protector ; it was now for the first time that these reflections convinced him of the ill consequences that might ensue from so long secluding his Bertha from the world, and resolved no longer to refuse the earnest and pressing entreaties of the Countess of Etherwold for her removal to the castle.

The morning's repast had scarcely ended, when, Bertha beheld the stranger approach ; she pointed him out to her father, whilst an additional glow spread over her lovely features.

Lord Alfred entered ; and the morning salutations being ended, they conversed with that freedom that marks so amply the character of politeness and good breeding.

Sir Godfrey in the mind of his guest found every emblem of a noble nature, and a superior excellence of heart and understanding ; they parted mutually pleased, and mutually regretting each other.

Days and even weeks passed in calm, unruffled serenity at the Abbey, though not without a constant daily visit from Alfred ; who, indeed had felt the advances of a first love, and now drank deeply of its sweet intoxication. The Abbey became almost a second home ; and Sir Godfrey, pleased with the society of a being so every way deserving, became less reserved : and though he never observed the evident brilliancy that sparkled in the eyes of Alfred at the approach of his daughter, he became so much accustomed to his daily visits, that he even experienced a disappointment if he came not as usual, though no inducement could prevail on himself to pass the forest boundary : and Alfred need but little persuasion to renew the sight of beings that now made the greatest part of his present happiness.

CHAPTER VII.

LORD ALFRED was at this period near the age of nineteen. Within the castle lately resided the rich heiress of the earl of Clandale ; her father, recently deceased, had been by inheritance a baron of the realm ; but, having rendered

great service to the house of York, in one of those dreadful contentions between the rival princes, he had been dignified with the superior title and possessions of an earldom. He lived, however, but a very short time to enjoy this splendid acquisition.

The lord of Wilden and Etherwold was the bosom friend of the earl of Clandale; to him the latter bequeathed the guardianship of his daughter and her great fortunes; which, by his will, were vested solely in Isabella, on condition she espoused one of the baron's sons. To this scheme the baron of Wilden readily gave his sanction;—he was indeed anxious for its conclusion, and had long prepared the mind of Harrold for the splendid fortune that awaited him in an union with an heiress of such unbounded wealth as Isabella of Clandale.

Isabella was introduced to the baroness by no other title than that of Countess of Clandale. The lady Isabella was extremely young; but from the majestic height and fine proportion of her person, carried that womanly appearance that might deceive the most minute scrutiny, and make the observer conclude her at least four years older than she really was. There was a degree of *hauteur* strongly expressive in her countenance, whilst the firmness of her movements seemed to bear the emblems of a mind conscious of its own superiority, the diffident mind would tremble at their glances, and even the bold yield to the restraint she had power to enforce. Her manners were a counterpart with her appearance—sometimes arrogant, unbending, and commanding; but when she had any particular whim she wished gratified, she knew how to assume the softest persuasive looks, and the most insinuating method of address.

Harrold had never seen the rich heiress till the death of her father introduced her to the castle. He well knew his father's designs; the possession of such a splendid title as Isabella confer, seemed to gratify even his ambition, and which, by the death of the earl of Clandale, he was in a fair way of attaining. But he was here again, as on a former occasion, doomed to disappointment, at least difficulty, from the excessive pride of the young Countess, who, sensible of the dignity of her birth and fortune, seemed to expect more submission and homage than suited the disposition of his mind to stoop to, even as a lover. Yet he reflected the prize, once obtained, was worth the sacrifice, and to dissemble an honourable regard, was to him a task no way afflictive. Thus denied, he assumed the character of a lover the most passionate and tender, but received only looks of coldness, disapprobation, and refusal in return; whilst on the insensible Alfred were lavished those speaking glances which Harrold vainly hoped to excite.

Alfred, knowing that the lady Isabella of Clandale was the destined bride of his brother, had never in the least entered into the character and actions of the young countess;—unconscious of the wound he had made in her heart, and little dreaming of the storm that hung over his hopes and wishes, he still continued his visits to the Abbey.

Unsuspecting of a conquest so little desired, he had subdued the proud heart of Isabella; and a passion, sudden as unconquerable, took possession of her senses. His gallant form and manly features fascinated her eyes, and the excellent and rare perfections of his mind rivited the chain in fetters of adamant; and she yielded resistless to the power of almighty love.

Isabella, the proud, imperious Isabella, was in turn subdued, of her passion nor did she fear a refusal whenever she could reveal, at the Baron's command, the choice she had made; neither did her vanity ever suffer her to suppose that, on the part of Alfred, she should meet with any opposition to her wishes.—That Alfred never addressed her in the semblance of love; she attributed to his supposition of the union that had been planned between herself and his brother, to whom she neither behaved with encouragement, nor absolutely rejected his suit; but rather submitted to his importunities from vanity, than a serious intention to listen to them with attention or respect.

But to the great penetration of Harrold, this conduct, and its cause, could not long remain undiscovered; he saw his hopes of greatness sink for ever beneath the more fortunate power of a rival brother, and he cursed his fate—imprecated maledictions, dreadful and dangerous, on the unsuspecting Alfred. His dark featured countenance became clouded and gloomy, expressing too legibly the secrets of a heart that was distorted by contending passions, rendering life itself an almost insupportable burthen.

Alfred one evening entering the Abbey, and finding Bertha equipped for their usual evening's ramble, they pursued their walk down the western avenue; and Sir Godfrey being too much indisposed to accompany them, Bertha went not unattended, but was followed at a distance by her favourite Ruth.

Whether it was the rich glow of the setting sun that shone full on his charming companion, the azure of her expressive eyes; or whether Bertha was this evening more lovely or more animated than usual, is difficult to determine: but Alfred viewed her, as her light graceful form moved with native elegance—with silent rapture his eyes became so bent upon her sweet countenance, that Bertha she knew not why, felt her face crimson with an unusual glow, especially as Alfred, softly taking her hand, and still with the fascinated gaze of respectful love fixed on her innocent countenance, thus asked, with the most insinuating emphasis of tone and manner—

“Has the lady Bertha never felt the soft emotions of love; or is her heart totally insensible to its painfully pleasing sensations?”

Alfred sighed deeply as he waited, with eager attention, for a reply; when Bertha, not knowing what she did or said, unconsciously raised her speaking eyes to the face of Alfred, and their encountering looks scarce needed any other translation of their hearts: but in a moment the lovely girl's sunk in increased confusion; whilst Alfred, half-doubting, half-certain of his happiness, remained silent, unable to break the confusion of both, his heart one moment rising in hope and ecstasy, and sinking again in tumultuous dread and apprehension;—at length however, he again repeated, as he pressed the hand of Bertha to his lips, which she attempted not to withdraw—

“Am I then, from this silence, to conclude that my gentle companion is free from the passion of love; or does she delight in witnessing the sufferings of a lover unrequited?”

“I love my father!” hastily replied Bertha, in a soft, low, hesitating tone of voice.

“Ah!” quickly interrupted Alfred, “but a heart so tender as your's, charming



Bertha, cannot remain unsusceptible of other affections than parental love;—there is a refined, an honourable passion, which heaven has ordained to be the happiness and reward of earthly goodness—such a passion as I at this moment endure in all its purity;” but the object of my adoration is insensible to my unalterable devotion, and I tremble lest the temerity of this confession should be disapproved and rejected. Forgive the suc-

denness of this abrupt disclosure of a passion, lasting as life, and pure as your own thoughts when they ascend to the throne of Heaven. Say that I am not the object of your aversion; or, if that be too much in me to ask, Oh! drive me not to despair by saying that you hate me!”

Alfred had sunk on his knees during this speech, whilst he still retained the hand of Bertha, which indeed she had not recollection to withdraw.

Bertha, though disconcerted by this unexpected confession, found she had no alternative but an absolute necessity to make a suitable answer, such as the feelings of her heart should dictate.

“My Lord Alfred,” she replied “can never be an object of hatred or indifference to the heart of Bertha, when she recollects the generous services he performed

in her rescue from inevitable destruction.—He must now be satisfied with the assurance that he can never be disregarded by the grateful Bertha and her father.”

Alfred listened with eager attention to this speech, which he felt somewhat at a loss how to translate; it was no acknowledgment—no declaration of a mutual regard, and only dictated from the emotions of a heart grateful for such trifling aid as he had been fortunate enough to afford her. He would have felt hurt, nay almost certain that his passion was at present hopeless, did not the increasing confusion of her manner, for Bertha trembled, and feared indeed she had expressed too much, strike conviction to his heart of the concealed meaning of her words, such as his wishes would have anticipated; and catching both her hands, with all the ardour of an accepted lover, he pressed them to his lips as he still remained kneeling before her; from which position no entreaties of Bertha could induce him to rise, till an unwelcome voice from among the trees, repeating his name, at no great distance, in an instant dissolved the ecstatic charm, and rising hastily, he cast up his eyes, and, in evident vexation, beheld the lady Isabella and Harrold, who stood, with looks of anger and wonder, a witness of the scene that had passed.

“Good evening to my lord Alfred,” said the Countess, with a sarcastic tone of voice, “the romantic glooms of the forest are certainly very inviting; and your lordship can never be at a loss for amusement whilst they contain such bewitching attractions.”

Pride, spleen and disappointment had dictated this speech, and Bertha, the most innocent and guileless of Heaven’s earthly creatures, now felt as if overwhelmed with shame, and that in the late transaction she had, in listening to the confession of Alfred, committed some heinous trespass, for which the malicious speech of Isabella was but a just punishment.

Ruth at this moment appearing, she threw herself into her arms, and turned towards the Abbey; but was unable to proceed, from a sudden faintness that seized her spirits, and rendered her motionless, though not insensible.

Lady Isabella’s passion mastered her reason. A sight, so blasting to the hopes, so unequivocally confirming the impossibility of their gratification, chilled her heart with despair, and roused all the bitter effects of a jealous mind to rage and resentment. With a smile of exquisite contempt, she added—

“But I beg forgiveness for my intrusion, which I see has unfortunately interrupted the harmony of your reciprocal meeting, favour me my lord Harrold with your support, and let us retire from a scene where our society was so little desired and our intrusion so ill-timed.”

She was departing, when Alfred, with a degree of anger and resentment, exclaimed—

“Stop one moment, lady Isabella, and allow me to convince you that your suspicions, to this lady’s prejudice, are as cruel as unfounded; nor is she a being whose humility of birth would sanction the freedom of your ladyship’s right to scrutinize imperiously her actions, who, in nobility of descent, is little inferior to yourself; the father of lady Bertha is Sir Godfrey Brandon, the well known friend of the Countess of Etherwold.—As my father’s ward, and the betrothed of my lord and brother, you are entitled to my respect; but when the Countess of

Clandale stoops to forget herself, and injuriously insults an innocent lady, she should be reminded that she has forfeited all her claims to that politeness and respect she would otherwise be entitled to command."

Alfred, shocked at the anguish which this rude intrusion had occasioned in the timid and delicate mind of Bertha, had answered with that degree of resentment which he could not overcome, he took the arm of Bertha within his own, and gently led her forward.

Isabella, as Bertha disappeared, started as if some sudden recollection had crossed her thoughts, which in a moment seemed to agitate her with an unknown source of inward meditations; and uttering something like inward, though indistinct threatenings, bent her way towards the castle.

Harrold seemed not without his internal meditations on the foregoing scene; and though he had been only a mute observer, his eyes were too deeply engaged on the admirable perfections of Bertha, to render him any other than an inactive spectator. He had seen, for the first time, the surpassing loveliness of Bertha, he envied the more fortunate Alfred, who had first discovered this hidden treasure, and engrossed it so entirely. In a moment the dark project of revenge was formed in his mind; he aimed at no less than depriving his brother of all that he held most dear, and he expected to ruin him for ever in his father's love and good opinion, to defeat the growing love of Isabella, who would then gladly accept of himself, and in the end, reward him with the possession of a creature, whose beauties had already excited a flame as impossible to overcome, as it was dangerous to its object.

Bertha, the innocent, unconscious Bertha, now felt herself a new-created being; she rather flew than hastened through the forest, and, for the first time, the voice of Alfred failed in its power to charm her attention. The scene was changed; she who never had received the slightest breath of reproach, was now unable to subdue the agitations of her wounded feelings, and the tender assiduities of Alfred to re-assure her to self-confidence and esteem, were in vain: she silently listened to his arguments, but felt too deeply shocked at the late scene to be able to make any answer.

Arrived at the Abbey gates, she bade him, in faltering accents, adieu; and entering the hall, stopped not till she found herself in her own chamber, where, throwing herself on a couch, she gave vent to a violent flood of tears.

Dejected and unhappy, she began a review of the late transactions, and severely took herself to task for her want of fortitude in not repelling the confession of Alfred. She now resolved that no event in future, should make her forget the respect due to her own character, or expose her again to the effects of a concealed regard.

"Till this moment," sighed she, as she prepared to resign herself to repose, "Till this moment I never conceived that harm could be attached to an intimacy, which, however, innocent in itself, is wrong when indulged at the expense of worldly opinions.—Oh Alfred! noble, beloved—yes, my beloved friend! in whom I have experienced a brother's chaste affection, we must meet no more—no more renew those pleasing employments that together we have partaken.

Alfred had no sooner entered the castle than he received a summons to attend his father in the library.

“Alfred,” said the baron, rising, “I have sent for you for the purpose of informing myself truly of some idle reports that fame has been busy in raising to your disadvantage. It is said, my lord, that you have of late bestowed not only your time, but your regard on the charms of a rustic forester; now, as these are tales I cannot well credit the truth of, I desire to hear a positive affirmation or denial from yourself alone, on whose honour I rely, that so I may judge how best to refute the calumnies of your enemies, and to restore the lustre of your good name.”

“My lord,” replied Alfred firmly, determined to pretend ignorance of the baron’s informer, “whoever may be the persons to deprive me of your good opinion, I can assure you the calumny is unfounded; and let me also conjure you my lord, to rely on the honour of your son, who will never form any connection but such as sanctioned by your approbation.”

“There is no necessity, my lord, for these assurances; I meant only to caution your heart, lest it becomes too fascinated to a present object, to permit the reception of another, who may lay claim to your good will and acceptance.—But no more of this; the baroness and lady Isabella wait our presence.”

So saying, he took the arm of the wondering Alfred, and led him to the banquet hall,

CHAPTER VIII.

THE warlike state of England, soon after this period, again renewed her bloody battles; again the intrepid Margaret, queen of Henry VI., had conquered the bold aspiring York, and driven him from his short-lived seat of greatness, to reinstate her consort on the throne of his fathers.

The general disaffection of the barons of the realm called for the strongest vigilance; and Margaret more particularly fixed her eye upon the suspected conduct of Egbert whose crafty policy she was too well aware of; nor could the utmost management of Egbert avoid the threatened blow, for Margaret had placed her spies over the actions of the Baron, and by their means, had obtained timely intimation of his secret commerce with the enemy.

Henry the VI., king of England, but little regardless of the gloomy state of his tottering power, devoted himself to the pleasures of a private and retired life, and without a sigh he quitted the busy trappings of regal pomp and greatness, to the guidance of his more spirited and enterprising consort.

It was from this period that the strong towers of Etherwold began to assume a very different aspect. It was nearly situated to the seat of war, and once more

its large courts and lofty battlements echoed to the sounds of martial warfare ; again the armed sentinel paced the ramparts, the watch-posts were stationed in the highest turrets, and the castle again assumed the formidable appearance of resistance ; its numerous retainers, and those of Wilden, filled its wards, and accoutred in armour, prepared under their chiefs, the baron and Harrold, to rush to the field of bloody contention.

Alfred alone remained inactive ; the baron had endeavoured to enlist him in the cause of York : but Alfred nobly replied, that though he would ever pay a son's obedience to his commands, yet, his honour forbade his engaging in opposition to Henry, to whom his allegiance had been guaranteed by the baroness.

With an army of almost fifteen hundred retainers and vassals, the baron and Harrold quitted the castle for the field of battle ; and joining the forces of Richard of York, his arrival was welcomed with triumphal shouts by that politic prince.

The castle was left with a sufficient guard to support it against a siege ; the fears of which, were banished by the first battle, in which the York party had been compelled to remove their camp to a more distant quarter.

It was some few evenings following that in which Bertha had received so deep an humiliation in the forest, that as she sat at the casement of the saloon, she observed a horseman galloping furiously towards the Abbey. Alarmed at a sight so unusual, she pointed to her father the object.

Sir Godfrey advanced to the window, as the stranger entered through the arch of the great gates ; and starting, wildly exclaimed—

“ Great God ! what means this unexpected visit ?—Am I at length free ; or is there yet an increase of misery in store for the wretched Godfrey ? ”

Bertha, with amazement, viewed the contending emotions that shook the frame of Sir Godfrey ; she arose alarmed from her seat, and tenderly taking his hand, said—

“ My father, why are you thus distressed—why thus agitated ?—Oh ! why has fate denied me the blessing of parental confidence ?—why is this dreaded—this hidden misery shut within your own bosom solely, and your Bertha, your only child, excluded from participating in an evil she might lighten, at least sooth with sympathy if not entirely eradicate. ”

Sir Godfrey fixed his eyes alternatively upon the door, with impatient expectation of the entrance of the stranger, and angrily on Bertha. At length he said with a sternness that cut her to the very soul—

“ Bertha, have I not often cautioned you never to enquire into the secret cause of my actions ? Rest satisfied, your father has too deep a motive for that expressive sorrow which I perceive you have observed. I would shelter you from its effects—but, as you value my blessing or displeasure, never, repeat a question that I am for ever silent upon. ”—The door at that moment opened, and a tall figure, habited in black, and his person concealed by a long cloak of the same, entered the chamber.—“ Retire, ” continued Sir Godfrey, “ I have some private concerns that demand your absence. ”—The tear stood in the eye of Bertha, who felt her heart quite subdued by this unusual severity. It was observed by Sir Godfrey, who, felt that he had spoken unkindly ; and now softening his features, took her hand with tenderness, that in a moment cheered the drooping Bertha, and silently lead-

ing her to the door, kissed her cheek as he closed it upon her; and Bertha, with infinite amazement, heard the door bolted strongly within. Alarmed, and not knowing what to think, she stood listening to the sounds of their voices, which, however, sunk so low as not to be heard, and in an instant all was total silence.

In any other situation Bertha would have severely upbraided herself for such an act of meanness; she could not help thinking that this was the person who had so long been the cause of his unhappiness. Impressed with this apprehension, she placed her eye to the chink of a broken pannel in the door, and heard Sir Godfrey exclaim, "Follow me!" and in an instant after, she saw him open a small space in the wainscot, through which he entered a dark and empty void, and was followed by the stranger with a lighted taper, who no sooner had passed the entry, than the pannel slid again into its former position.

Astonishment now succeeded alarm, and her fears of danger to Sir Godfrey gave place to other concerns of equal importance. She entered her chamber; and seating herself in the recess of the turret-window, continued for a length of time to ruminate on the many occurrences that had lately followed in such quick succession.

She continued watching the moon, as it rose in unclouded majesty over the dark woods of the forest. More than two hours had elapsed, during which time she continued to remain at the casement, her impatience once more to behold her father, prompted her to rise from her chair, with a design to enter the saloon, when the door was thrown violently open, and Ruth flew into the chamber. The fears of Bertha had but one object, and she eagerly demanded—

"Where is my father? where is Sir Godfrey?—Speak, Ruth, for heaven's sake, speak the occasion of this uncommon alarm!"

"Oh my lady! pardon my boldness, but I am almost beside myself with joy."

"But from what cause?" impatiently demanded Bertha.

"Why please you, my lady, there's a fine to do in the Abbey, occasioned by the arrival of this stranger. My lord has sent me to your ladyship, to desire you will attend him instantly. Oswell is gone to the castle, and my master has given orders to quit the Abbey once more."

"Quit the Abbey!" repeated the lady Bertha, "I fear, Ruth, your senses are unsettled, as your language and meaning are incoherent and mistaken."

"Mistaken!" replied Ruth, "nay then, my lady, if you will not believe me, my lord will convince you. He has been giving commands, that all should be ready for departure by midnight."

"Gracious heaven!" exclaimed Bertha, "to what do these mysterious circumstances relate?"

Ruth was endeavouring to explain them; but Bertha was quickly out of hearing, and had already reached the door of the saloon;—her heart beat with unusual emotion, and entering gently, perceived her father alone.

He was pacing, with quick and hurried steps, the length of the apartment. With the noise of the opening door, Sir Godfrey was roused from his meditations, and raising his eyes they encountered those of Bertha. With a look full of tenderness as she approached, he threw his arms around her, and embraced her with

an excess of parental affection and tears, impossible to restrain, fell upon the neck of Bertha, at length he exclaimed—

“Bertha, I leave the Abbey this night.”

“This night, my lord!” repeated Bertha; then after a pause of momentary regret, “I am ready, my father, this instant to attend you.”

“Never, my child, must we pass this forest together!” replied Sir Godfrey, “you must remain here; for your own safety alone depends on our present separation. Grieve not, my Bertha, the evils that part us are but temporary, and, should I live to return, all these mysterious woes will cease to be.”

“Remain here!” feebly ejaculated Bertha,—“Oh! no, no, you cannot, shall not refuse me to accompany you!—My father loves me too well to deny this only request of his child.”

“Bertha,” interrupted Sir Godfrey, “you know how much dearer to me are your security and happiness than my own existence.—You have too often remarked the secret misery that has so long disturbed my repose, and I have before forbade your enquiry into those sorrows. Should the indispensable cause that calls me from the Abbey, prove fortunate to my wish, I may yet again be restored to those serene enjoyments that I had for ever despaired of recovering in this life;—I leave you to the protection of strangers, it is true; but remember that Elvina of Etherwold is your father’s dearest, only living friend, and beneath her fostering roof will my Bertha find security till her father returns.”

“Since I am deprived of the dear privilege of attending my father,—without his loved society, all places are alike to me, why may I not be indulged in the only remaining wish left me, by still continuing to inhabit the Abbey till his return?”

“That must not be, my child!” replied Sir Godfrey,—“that I shall deeply feel the loss of your society, heaven knows is a deprivation I am ill able to combat with; but I submit to the decrees of destiny.”

The Abbey clock tolled the dreadful hour of parting, and a deathly sickness almost rendered her insensible, when Bertha beheld the entrance of Oswald, who came to inform his lord that all was ready for departure.

Sir Godfrey silently waved his hand, and Oswald instantly closed the door.

Bertha started from her seat in the wild transport of despair, she approached her father, and fell suddenly on her knees before him.

“My father!” she exclaimed, trying to stifle the sob that rent her heart, “my dear, my only parent, Oh! do not leave me for ever!—You are my all—the only being on earth I ever loved—I have no other friend existing if you desert me!—A dreadful presentiment fills my mind that I see you for the last time, and never, no never shall my eyes again behold you living, if I do not attend you on this expedition.—I will be what you would have me, and endeavour to teach my heart the only lesson difficult from you to learn—submission to this dreadful necessity.”

“Do not wrong me, my love,” replied Sir Godfrey, pressing his Bertha to his heart, “by supposing that I am less grieved than yourself at the bitterness of our separation.—It is the first you have ever known, and its suddenness increases the sorrow you feel;—but moderate these transports of grief, and learn, if possible to subdue such afflictive feelings entirely. The baroness is prepared to receive

you, that will for a short time, compensate for my absence. A month, or six weeks are the utmost limits of my stay ; and at the end of that period, I shall again enfold you my child."

"The time is precious," he hastily exclaimed, "and one hour lost may destroy all hope for ever ; not only depriving my Bertha of her birthright, but even this last retreat may be rudely torn from her inheritance.—Should I, Bertha, be restored to those possessions that villany has deprived me of, you shall then know the unhappy story of my woes ; but if I return not at the stated period, this key, which I will send by Oswell, unlocks the cabinet that stands in my private closet, where you will find the documents of your birthright, and such other papers as will insure your welfare.—Adieu, my child ! Providence, whose peculiar care is ever over the innocent and the defenceless, will not leave you unprotected ;—Angels guard thee !"

Sir Godfrey impressed a fervent kiss upon the pale quivering lips of his suffering daughter, and gently placing her in the arms of her attendant, vaulted on his saddle, and, with the speed of lightning, darted down the avenue, and was in an instant beyond the sight or hearing of the unhappy Bertha ; who, uttering only a faint sigh, fell senseless into the arms of Ruth, and was borne to her own apartments.

Bertha, by the united care of her people, once more opened her eyes ; and when again restored to sensation, beheld the good old Adam, who, bending low his venerable head, thus addressed her—

"The ways of providence are wise and unsearchable. My lord's departure from the Abbey being so sudden, is, a very heavy grievance to you, and to all your poor people ; but, as he will soon return, I hope you will let that remembrance cheer you for the grief of his absence."

It was now about the dawn of morning, and Bertha tried to compose her agitated spirits to repose ; but the restless state of her mind admitted not of sleep, and she continued in a lethargy of sorrow and regret. A long train of reflections and conjectures started on her fancy as she recalled the past, and deeply ruminated on the future. Dejected, forlorn, and miserable, she threw herself on her couch ; and at one moment was tempted to accuse Sir Godfrey of cruelty ; till remembering that he was himself the victim of sorrow and oppression—"Ah ! no, I wrong my noble father," she sighed forth ; "he loves me too well needlessly to desert me. Some unknown cause of deeper consequence than I have power to fathom, alone has impelled me to this regretted expedient."

The first day passed away in tears,—“In a month,” she frequently repeated, “my dear father will return.”—The thought had a balmy influence over her mind ; and she never once permitted herself to think, or even imagine, how many circumstances might intervene to delay his arrival on the appointed day.

Whilst busied in these reflections, a courier from the castle arrived at the Abbey with dispatches ; and Bertha, breaking their seals, read as follows :

“The baroness of Etherwold waits with the tenderest impatience to embrace the lovely daughter of her friend Sir Godfrey Brandon ; and entreats the lady



Bertha will no longer defer her anxiously desired visit. Elvina would herself joyfully have escorted her lovely ward from the Abbey, but is prevented by the sudden arrival and departure of the Baron. She trusts her young friend will honour the castle with her presence ere the decline of day.

“ELVINA ETHERWOLD.”

“Ah!” sighed Bertha, how gladly would I remain in this dear, venerated spot, were it permitted.

As if she was parting for ever from a home that had long been dear to her, Bertha took a melancholy walk throughout the Abbey, and to each well-known spot dear to memory; with the sorrow she felt at quitting their beloved haunts was mixed a kind of wonder at the strangeness of so sudden and unexpected a removal. Lastly, she visited the forest and the gardens, and all the plants that had been set by her own, and the hand of Alfred.

Exerting her fortitude, she entered the saloon, in hopes her regret would subside when removed from these objects of her care and regard. But there stood another group that more powerfully claimed her attention; among the foremost of the household were Adam and Mabel.

“And will you indeed leave us, my lady?” sobbed forth the latter, affected to tears.

“’Tis my father’s command, my good Mabel, that I should remain at the castle during his absence,” replied Bertha. “But hear is employment for you

while I am away," giving the latter a heavy purse. "You know what I mean; don't forget my poor old friends, nor forget my little favourites!"

"That I'll be sworn she won't, my dear lady," replied Adam. But pardon your old steward's freedom," he continued "the world will talk, and many strange reports hath it given out to my lord's prejudice, which it does not become me to relate;—I could reveal much, but durst not; 'tis as well I say, my lady, be on your guard against an evil hour!"

Bertha silently gave her hand to Adam, which the old gentleman respectfully bowing upon, gently again resigned. She entered the covered car that waited to convey her to the castle, and taking one last agonizing look at the Abbey, bade Adrian proceed.

The sun had set ere they arrived in sight of the castle. Bertha viewed its lofty battlements and ponderous black towers with a kind of inward dread she was unable to account for: a thousand fears and doubts agitated her thoughts, and, with bitter regret, she wept the hard necessity that had left her no choice, of residence but this.

As the carriage passed through the courts, and arrived at the great gates of the castle hall, she beheld lord Alfred awaiting beneath the outward corridor her approach. A soft heaving agitated her bosom, and her heart, seemed inclined to leap from its prison; Alfred, with rapturous joy, welcomed her arrival to the castle to the apartments of the lady Elvina, he again softly whispered—"Welcome, angelic Bertha, thrice welcome to Etherwold! Oh may its towers long possess so fair an inmate!"

The opening of a pair of magnificently gilt folding doors saved her from further restraint; and Bertha, for the first time, saw the baroness, in whose open majestic countenance she felt many of her fears vanish, for the lady Elvina, with looks that spoke the sincerity of her possessions, threw her arms around her with all the warmth of regard and friendship thus said—

"Welcome, most welcome, lovely Bertha! believe me, charming lady, though I sympathize with yourself in the deprivation you have sustained by the absence of Sir Godfrey, I am so selfish as to wish it prolonged, since it will afford me the long-desired gratification of his daughter's society, whom, I shall love as much as if nature had given me a prior claim to her heart and affections.

Bertha gratefully returned the friendly pressure said—

"You alone, dearest lady, can teach me how to express, as I ought, my thanks for a reception, I fear, so unmerited friendly."

Bertha, cast her eyes around, and trembled as she, for the second time, encountered the piercing glances of the young Countess of Clandale, whose eyes were rivetted with a peculiar meaning on her face and person, the baroness, apologizing for her momentary remissness, thus said—

"I present to your notice and regard, lady Isabella, the daughter of my noble friend, Sir Godfrey, in whose society I trust you will experience the pleasures of a refined friendship."

Lady Isabella, putting aside the hand of Bertha, bowed slightly; said, with an almost inarticulate sound.

"Methinks the lady Bertha has somewhat diminished in the beauty of her

looks since I was last honoured with a sight of her person: the lustre of her bright eyes seems faded, and the deep crimson of modest diffidence, that then mantled her cheeks, has given place to the pale blush of the rose.

The baroness heard not the malicious discourse of Isabella; and Bertha, disdainful an answer, felt her cheeks glow with a shame she could not suppress, and sighing deeply, she suppressed the rising tear that would force its passage to her eyes.

The baroness entered into an elegant conversation with her guest till the hour of retirement arrived, when they parted mutually pleased with each other.

On the north side of the castle was a deep paved terrace, that overhung the ocean itself, and had only a low balustrade built at the extreme edge of the acclivity to secure the too near approach to the dark abyss of waters, and extended far beyond the battlements of the castle over the rocks which hung suspended, as it were, above the deep caverns and excavations that ran along the shores.

Here Alfred frequently led his adored Bertha; and together they would watch the glorious sublimity of the setting sun, as it sunk beneath the deep, leaving a golden track that darted its dazzling reflections among the glassy waves, in all the splendour of unrivalled brilliance.

'Twas one evening that Bertha had retired from the terrace sooner than usual to her own chamber, that the sound of horns and clarions awoke the echoes of the cliffs, and proclaimed the approach of visitors; and Ruth, soon after entering hastily her lady's apartments, exclaimed—

“Oh lawks, my lady! I am out of my wits with joy!” The baron with a noble train of knights and cavaliers, are coming with the duke of York to partake of a banquet triumph, in honour of their late victory gained over the Lancastrians. Now, my lady, only think how lively such grand company will make the castle. I dare say there will be nothing but jests in the great courts, and dancings and rejoicings in the hall.”

Oh my lady, I was sent with a message, but the sight of such noble strangers nearly put it out of my head, I was in the hall trying to get out of the way, when the lord Harrold bade me hasten to your ladyship, with his earnest respects, that you will allow him the honour of a visit on business of importance.

Bertha listened with surprise, to this strange request, bade her return to lord Harrold with a positive refusal. Ruth reluctantly obeyed.

Bertha now opened the door that led to the corridor, as she wished to gain a sight of the Baron; and approaching the balustrades she looked into the hall below, and saw a croud of knights, clothed in armour, at that moment the lady Elvina entered and was met by a tall figure clothed in steel, evidently the superior of the rest, and approaching him, she made a low obeisance as she kissed his hand, and welcomed the Baron to his castle.

Assured that it was the Baron, Bertha fixed her gaze upon him. His countenance was unpossessing, his lordly port and commanding person conveyed the idea of self-importance, his features were large, heavy and muscular. But she was shocked at the coldness with which the Baron received his lady, but to lady Isabella he embraced her with a warm and pleasing regard.

She was still leaning through the fretwork, that hid her from being seen, when

the noise of an approaching footstep alarmed her, she turned round and beheld lord Harrold coming towards her; Bertha surprised at seeing him, slightly bowed as she was passing, but Harrold, placing himself against the door of her chamber, addressed her:—

“Forgive this intrusion, lady, the humblest of your admirers stands before you; and though denied the consent of entering your presence, you will, I trust, pardon the trespass of love,” (sinking on his knees) “I love you with a passion ardent and sincere; and that you, and you only, most lovely of women have power to raise a flame in the bosom of Harrold. And at the forthcoming tournament when the brave will be contending, and each knight be decked with the token of love, let me have the triumphant felicity of been the sworn knight of the lady Bertha Brandon, and to bear her token.

Bertha was filled with terror, as she listened to this wild rhapsody, it rendered her incapable of power to speak or quit him.

A resistless passion had taken possession of Harrold though he well knew; she was devoted to his brother, yet, did he resolve if possible, to supplant that near relative. He had marked the devoted for his own. And now the silence of Bertha encouraged him, he thus continued:—

“Afford me lady one small token of esteem, if but a bracelet or glove.”

“My lord,” said Bertha with resentment at such a request “you must pardon me, when I declare the demand you have made, suits not the respect due to myself to grant.”

“’Tis well, madam,” interrupted Harrold, “I find though cold to Harrold, doubtless, lord Alfred as no cause to complain of the reserve of lady Bertha, but know lady,” he added, seizing her hand, “the first moment I beheld you, my soul owned you only as its mistress, I swear I love you! I will dispute your heart with every competitor! In vain you tell me you cannot return my love; beware, lady—Alfred never shall be your’s; and if you persist with coldness to slight my love, it may prove fatal to him and you.”

“Unhand me, my lord,” angrily exclaimed Bertha. “You forget yourself in the respect due to your father’s guest, and the daughter of Sir Godfrey Brandon.”

“I see,” replied Harrold, “the lady Bertha can assume the semblance of indignant virtue; Alfred is a fortunate lover no doubt, but let him tremble.”

Bertha became alarmed, she thought it but prudent to suppress the just indignation she felt, and in order to soften his present anger, she mildly said—

“My lord, the impropriety of this interview distresses me. I pray you leave me, the hour grows late.”

“I obey your wishes lady, and take shame on me for improper expressions I may have used derogatory to the purity of your perfect self, deign to grant, the required token that shall animate me to victory.”

Bertha found by his resolute manner, that to refuse the gift would be useless; hastily unclasping a bracelet of pearls, she was presenting it, when a distant footstep alarmed her, she suddenly started for fear of discovery of her forced situation, and from Harrold rushed along the gallery, into a dark passage, continued her speed with rapidity: the distant echo of footsteps, convinced her, she was

pursued by Harrold, she continued to dart forward, anxious to preserve the token from Harrold. She found the passage branched off to the left, but overcome by the want of respiration, she sunk fainting against a door, which giving way, she had nearly fallen, but was, supported in the arms of a man. Thinking it was her pursuer, she shrieked, and fearfully exclaimed—

“I command you lord Harrold, to desist, I will appeal to the Baron, to protect me from these insults.”

An unknown voice replied,—“You have nothing to dread lady, nor shall any insult pass unregarded by him who is guardian to all, who reside beneath this roof.”

Bertha raising her eyes, found herself in the arms of the baron, releasing herself, she bowed her acknowledgments, when the baron said—

“If my conjectures deceive me not, I now address the lady Bertha Brandon. It seems” continued the baron, “you have been persecuted by lord Harrold, but let me entreat you not to be alarmed, rest satisfied I will be answerable for his future respectful behaviour; allow me to see you to your chamber?”

Arrived at the door, she thanked the baron, for his attention. Bertha overcome by the emotions that agitated her, could not refrain from exclaiming, as tears came to her relief—

“Oh my father! where, where are you now wandering? Oh why were your commands so strongly enjoined for my removal from the dear Abbey? Had I there remained, I had at least been freed from the mortifying degradations of this evening,—Oh when will you return to release your Bertha from the cold forbidding looks of lady Isabella, and the importunate dangers of the daring pursuits of Harrold?”

As she lay restlessly reflecting on the occurrences of the night, she debated if it were not more prudent for her instantly to return to the Abbey, than to continue in the castle, where she might again be subject to evils of she hardly knew what nature.

In this disturbed and undeterminate state of mind she passed the two first hours after midnight, when sleep at length closed her eyes in a leaden embrace. Her repose was, however, unrefreshing and embittered by dreams of horror and affright.

During their continuance, the first object that presented itself, was a tall gaunt figure, whose person was clothed in a long black flowing garment; his face was rendered invisible by a mask, but there seemed a resemblance in his gait and person to the strange mysterious visitor that had occasioned her father's sudden absence from the forest. The figure beckoned her forward, and fearful and trembling, she found herself irresistibly impelled to follow. Her awful guide silently and slowly passed down the corridor, and opening the door of the east chamber, she found herself in a spacious dreary apartment. A track of blood stained the floor; advancing forward, her guide pointed to the ground, on which she beheld the dead corpse of a man, whose features, on examination, bore strong resemblance to those of Alfred.

Before she had time to express the grief this terrific spectacle occasioned, the figure silently beckoned her from the scene of death, and as she passed through

the chamber, she found herself, by the unaccountable diversity of visionary fiction, in the great church of the Abbey. It appeared to be midnight, and the place more than really gloomy, from two or three tapers that faintly shone from the middle of the grand aisle;—approaching these, she perceived they were suspended over a new-made open grave, near which was placed a coffin, covered with velvet, and strewed with sable plumes of feathers;—as she cast her eyes into the tomb, the lid of the coffin suddenly fell to the ground, and a voice from within, hollow and piercing, audibly pronounced—“Remember the mysterious warning you have received, and beware of the house of Neville.”—The lid, with no apparent aid, suddenly returned to its former position. She was conveyed again to the castle by her awe-inspiring guide, and with the violence of her terror, she awoke.

It was some time before she could calm the agitation that her dream had excited, and daylight was joyfully welcomed; her emotion was soon forgotten, for she now for the first time missed the bracelet she was positive she had never yielded to Harrold the previous evening. Grieved for its loss, for it had been her mother's whom she never knew, she had loved and venerated it from the reverence her father always inspired toward her memory.

Bertha was deeply engaged in searching for it, when Ruth entered the room. “Dear my lady,” she exclaimed “what can have made you look so unwell to-day. You seem as though you had had no sleep all night; but my lady—I have news that will surprise you. My lord Alfred, last night encountered his brother in the corridor leading to your apartments, my young lord asked, what business he had at so late an hour near your chamber, Harrold refused to give any satisfaction: and if the baron had not arrived at that critical time, they would have drawn their swords: he took my lord Harrold to task for his rudeness to your ladyship, which so much offended him, that he ordered all his people to follow him from the castle at that late hour. Alfred had overheard a little that had passed between yourself and Harrold, and this was the cause of the quarrel. But my lady, there will be no tournament, the duke of York sent to decline his intended visit; the queen is on the march again, and the baron returns to the army.”

Bertha was distressed that the transaction had been made so public, she determined to lay open her heart to the baroness, and make her acquainted with the first introduction and succeeding interviews with Alfred.

She proceeded to the apartments of that lady. The baroness sat with her back opposite the door, Bertha with surprise beheld her in tears, and she debated whether to retire unnoticed, than seem to wish to be acquainted with sorrow, never intended for her knowledge.

The baroness sighed deeply. At that moment an interior door opening, Bertha had only time to secrete herself behind the one she held in her hand, when she heard the voice of the baron, who loudly said,—

“Are you, lady, resolved to yield me that, which, if not freely given, I have power to obtain, or will you compel me to have recourse to violence?”

The harsh tones, in which these words were spoken, made her almost doubt

who the speaker was, so unlike the courteous manner of the baron the preceding evening addressed to herself. Bertha silently retired to her own chamber.

It was this same evening, the baron gained from Isabella the state of her heart, and the choice it had made. The Baron sent for Alfred in his private chamber.

“The will of the late earl of Clandale,” said the baron, addressing Alfred, “enjoins his heiress to espouse one of the heirs of Egbert. She has refused your brother, in favour of you my lord; I therefore, lay my commands upon your duty and have fixed the day of your nuptials within a fortnight of this, joyfully to receive the hand of lady Isabella.

Alfred overcome with grief, was unable to reply. Unprepared for such a demand, he was surprised into a silent acquiescence, and the politic Egbert hastened out of the chamber to prevent all chance of a refusal.

Starting from a deep reverie, Alfred pronounced the name Bertha,”—Ah adored of my soul! shall I resign the hope of one day calling you my own? Shall I, for the dross of riches for the imperious, and haughty Isabella, forego thy loveliness—Oh no! adored being of my regard, I am thine, only thine. Leaving the chamber, he went to the north terrace, to determine on some speedy means to avoid the hated nuptials.

The result was to make known the state of his affection to the baroness, which the latter received with emotions of pleasure mixed with pain; for she felt a warm regard for the lovely object of Alfred's choice, though she confessed she had no influence to induce the baron to yield to the persuasion of love, for he had that morning insisted on her consenting to the union of Isabella and Alfred.

The baroness had long resigned all interference in matters that her birth and fortune gave her a privilege of, choice or negative, she even trembled for the small share of felicity she had hitherto enjoyed. With grief she discovered the baron had taken a deep rooted prejudice, for he never addressed her but with harsh and clouded brow.

CHAPTER IX.

In those days of old, when every baronial chief was a prince upon his own domain, and subject to no law but his own will, the passions of a daring mind were not softened by the influence of an enlightened education, and much cruelty and bloodshed were the sad consequence where the power of doing evil was so ill restrained by the strength and potency of the law.

The heart of Harrold was naturally prone to evil and daring projects; he had

never submitted to controul. Impressed with a high idea of his consequence, and the dignities he should one day inherit, he expected every knee and lip that owned his father for their lord, should prostrate and confess the same superiority of his will, and pay homage to his future greatness; but fate had in store a powerful humiliation to his growing insolence, and in the superior and manly qualities of a younger brother, raised him a rival to the excessive pride of his aspiring nature. Ambition, cruelty, and the gratification of his passions were the ruling principles of his heart; but in the virtues of Alfred, he was to receive a check to his haughty mind.

With tempers such as these, that only waited the long inflamed moment to blaze forth with desolating wildness, and aided by the encouragement of a confidential slave, he had long vowed the ruin of a brother, whom from infancy he despised, and for whom he had felt the strongest hatred, on account of the superiority of his fortunes, and shining qualifications of his mind; to deprive whom of the rich possessions he was heir to, he had often formed the darkest plots and most daring designs.

And no sooner had he beheld Bertha, than she became the object of his ardent admiration, and he resolved to make her the instrument of retaliation on his brother; for was not Alfred the hated bar that opposed his ambitious hopes, and stepped between him and the possession of the towers of Etherwold?—Alfred was the being who had deprived him of the haughty but wealthy heiress; and whilst he in secret invoked curses on this fortunate brother, he resolved to have ample vengeance for these ideal injuries, and destroy for ever his hopes of happiness, by supplanting him in the affections of the object of his unrevealed choice whom he had no doubt of converting by importunate assiduity and entreaty, to his wishes; or should these means fail, force was resolved on to accomplish his unnatural thirst of vengeance:—but a very short acquaintance with the fascinating powers of Bertha's mind as well as person served, to inspire a passion as impetuous and real as it was in the end likely to prove dangerous to the object that excited it, and he resolved to take his measures accordingly.

For this purpose he had placed Hugo, his confidant, a spy over the actions of the unsuspecting lovers, from whose vigilance he learned their frequent meetings on the terrace. Unfortunately, Hugo had concealed himself on the very night that Alfred had obtained the proof of his Bertha's regard; and though Hugo could not, with safety of remaining undiscovered, hear all that passed, he returned to his employer with sufficient to convince him of a mutual understanding between them.

Rage and despair at first possessed his mind; but these passions subsiding, he resolved to force himself a way to the presence of the unconscious object of his passion.

The denial which Ruth (whom he had bribed) had brought him, served not to repel his purpose. He had followed her with his eyes as she passed along the gallery to the chambers of her lady, whose fortunate (for him) appearance soon after in the corridor, made him resolute to know at once what hopes he might in future entertain; he acted as has been already related.

The returns he met with to his real declarations of love, though slight, were



too decidedly delivered to admit of any hope in his favour hereafter; and burning with increased hatred towards his unoffending brother, and a fixed resolution to possess himself of Bertha, he scrupled not to determine upon violent measures should all others fail, to force her to compliance.

In his return from the ineffectual pursuit of Bertha, he encountered Alfred, who retiring down the gallery in his approach, to his own apartments had witnessed some parts of the conversation and transactions that had followed.—Roused to resentment at the indignity offered to the object of his tenderest regards he forgot his usual prudence and forbearance, and sternly reproached his brother for his inhospitable and insulting conduct, acknowledging in part his prior attachment for the lady Bertha, and nobly declaring that he would maintain his right, and defend the object of his regard from the insolence of his pretensions.

Harrold's reply was too insulting to be submitted to; and Alfred had just drawn his sword, as had also Harrold, when the baron, returning from the door of Bertha, arrived in time to prevent the breach from ending mortally.



Harrold with impatience submitted to the rebuke of a father, from whom he had neither received an example or precept;—his remonstrances therefore were heard with silent disregard and inward scorn; he retired in apparent anger to a small domain left him by a maternal uncle independent of his father, when he had here leisure to plot, undiscovered, those dark and alarming designs that had too long been encouraged in his guilty soul, for the ruin of those that had powerfully aroused his love and hatred.

In the young Countess of Clandale, Bertha was fated to find a determined enemy; for deep-rooted jealousy had taken possession of her heart from the moment she discovered the bent of Alfred's inclinations, whom she now watched with a scrutiny unceasing.

The baroness found little gratification in her society; the temper of Isabella rendering her incapable of a taste for elegant refinements;—but the baron's society was more congenial to her wishes, whose courtesy and attention to her rendered his presence pleasing, and his absence regretted. To Bertha she ever maintained a distant reserve that wore the appearance of mystery, from some hitherto unexplained reason.

Amidst the whirlwind of passions that had assailed her heart on the discovery, despair was the principal; and she resolved to tear from her heart the loved image of Alfred, and avenge herself, by hurling ruin on the object that engrossed those affections she aspired to make her own. At length the proud triumph of destroying the happiness of this hated rival, bore down every feeling, and she resolved to appear ignorant of Alfred's love for Bertha, that, under the baron's enforcement, she might at least divide the lovers, though all hope of being the bride of Alfred be for ever at an end.

With this design she made no scruple of confessing her regard for Alfred, when the baron demanded which of his sons was her choice;—and for this purpose the baroness was desired, in no very gentle terms, to break to Bertha the resolutions of the baron, who had discovered the mutual attachment between herself and Alfred.

It was on this subject that Bertha had caught some imperfect expressions as she retired from the apartments of lady Elvina, who suffered her not long to remain in suspense as to their import; she with deep regret made known the will of the baron, and the destined bride that was fated for her son.

“The baron, by means I know not, has acquainted himself with your mutual regards,” continued the baroness, “which have, I own, been long known to me. I grieve to add that it is expected you should voluntarily resign the hand of Alfred, should he offer it to your acceptance. Such, Bertha, is my lord's request; with regret I have delivered it, I trust you know my heart too well to misjudge it. I have only to hope that your affections are not so entirely engaged, but time may soften the severity of your disappointment.”

“It shall do so, madam,” interrupted Bertha, “with me at least, it shall conquer. From lady Paulina, I have ever received unkindness, the cause is explained, and Bertha will never more be the hated obstacle to her happier fortune. I own my heart has been too susceptible of the merits of my lord Alfred, whose ennobled virtues won my tenderest sentiments; but Bertha will no more

interfere with the designs of the baron—she will this evening free him by her return to her dearest home.”

“That must not be,” replied the baroness; “do not suppose, my love, the baron is averse to your union with our son; had not his honour been pledged, he would never have urged my lord Alfred against his inclinations. I owe my lord this justification, and now suffer me to entreat that you will abandon your hasty resolution of quitting the castle, and to owe your continuance to your free will. Stay my love, till Sir Godfrey’s return; nor will the lady Isabella presume again to insult a guest, and my friend under my protection.”

Bertha listened attentively to this speech, and thus called upon, she no longer hesitated in remaining at the castle.

In the evening she retired early to her own room. Entering the small detached closet that had a north prospect of the sea, and a side view of the eastern towers, she gave free vent to the anguish of her heart, and softly exclaimed—

“It is then determined, and I have freely resigned all pretensions to the affections of Alfred! But, ah! can I ever cease to remember how dear is his image to the heart of Bertha? Why, ah why! did I ever behold him? Ah beloved, adored Alfred! I shall never cease to esteem thy virtues, but a few days remain to make it criminal in me for ever after to think upon his name; he becomes, not thine, fond Bertha, but the husband of Isabella.”

While her mind was thus absorbed, her eyes were turned towards the eastern towers. The night was uncommonly dark; but her deep reveries were suddenly broke in upon by beholding a pale glimmer of light, which, for a minute, was seen through the window of the great east tower, as it passed slowly along several of the gothic casements, and then disappeared.

This extraordinary circumstance stopped for a moment the current of her melancholy reflections, and a quick recollection of the repeated mysterious accounts she had received of these towers, raised a superstitious dread to her heart; and she resolved to wait at the casement of her closet, in expectation that this mysterious occurrence would be repeated: but after a lapse of time spent in anxious watchings, the light did not return, and she sat ruminating on the event, till her thoughts became confused in a vortex of ideas; she was alarmed by a violent shriek: and the bursting open of the door of the antichamber made her rush hastily from the closet, where the pale, affrighted Ruth, who exclaiming, in a tone of horror—“I have seen it, I have seen the spectre!”—sunk upon a chair pointing to the open door.

Bertha shut the door; and after soothing the strong apparent terror of her attendant, at length obtained an answer of the cause of her alarm.

“Oh my lady,” she said, “as I was coming to attend your ladyship, and had reached the last step of the gallery stairs, which faces the old door of the eastern end that opens into the haunted chambers—all of a sudden the door flew open, and a figure, clothed in long black flowing robes, bearing a small taper, stood beneath the arch of the portal. I shrieked, and the ghost starting at the sound lifted up its pale ghastly visage, and fixing its hollow eyes full upon me, pointed for me to be gone. I had, my lady, lost all use of my limbs at first, and could not move; but terror soon restored me to my senses, and by the blessing of the

Virgin, I arrived at your ladyship's chamber just as the spectre vanished into the apartment, and the door was thrown to with a tremendous crash. I am sure I shall never dare to venture alone to the gallery; and if your ladyship don't speedily remove from these apartments, I fear you will soon have cause to repent."

Bertha endeavoured to argue her into a belief that what she thought she had seen, was but the effects of a strong imagination: but Ruth persisted in affirming the reality that Bertha, who, but a few moments before, had witnessed so extraordinary a phenomenon, now felt there was some dreaded mystery pertaining to this angle of the castle; she resolved to make known to the baroness the appearances she had witnessed, and solicit a change of apartments.

The baroness, listened to her with some degree of agitation. At length, she said—

"There is a degree of mystery relating to the east towers I have never been able to develop. In the life-time of my lord and father, the late baron of Etherwold, those chambers were ordered to be closed; and the only cause he assigned was the disgrace in being made the disloyal means of imprisoning a prince of England, here confined under one of the former barons of Etherwold; but this account is now entirely obsolete. That these apartments have so long remained uninhabited, was occasioned by the superstitious fears of succeeding generations. From this cause, together with the gloomy and ruinous aspect of the towers, they have been suffered to remain in their present delapidated and useless state."

"If I am not misinformed in the account I have gathered from the castle records," interrupted Alfred, who was present during the foregoing remark of lady Elvina, "it is reported that the prince who was here confined, was one night murdered in the tower chamber of his prison, by order of the governor, it still is the prevailing belief of the tenantry and retainers of the castle, that the spectre of the murdered captive still haunts at midnight the scene of his living sufferings. I cannot say I give much credence to the latter account; yet as I know the honour of our house stands impeached, I am determined to pass this very evening in them, for the satisfaction of my own curiosity as from a desire of silencing for ever these reports so injurious to the dignity of ourselves, as well as our ancestors."

The baroness and Bertha turned pale as Alfred finished his bold resolution, and even Isabella trembled. The former was about to entreat him to decline so fearful an enterprise, but the speech of the baron compelled her to refrain, who thus said—

"I applaud and approve your intentions. It will silence complaint on this subject. I shall anticipate, though I cannot stay to be a witness of your triumph, which will prove a prelude to the more splendid victor you will shortly attain, in the happiness that awaits you."

He cast a glance of meaning first on Alfred, then on Isabella, and bowing to the latter, left the banquet table.

"You are not really serious I hope, my lord," said the baroness, "in your resolution of examining the eastern chambers?"

Alfred, smiling for this anxiety, gracefully replied—

I am unconscious of having done an action that would call courage in question, where I capable of hesitating to perform my promise.”

The mind of Bertha was absorbed in her own gloomy reflections to bear longer the restraint put upon her feelings. She arose from the banquet, and alone retired to the north terrace, that she might give vent to the emotions that corroded her heart.

CHAPTER X.

IT was still the meridian of evening, when Bertha, willing to fly from her own thoughts, soon quitted the terrace by an armed postern that led to the open causeway, which afforded a narrow winding footpath among the cliffs down to the shores of the sea. Across this pass was thrown an antique gate, with a bridge that ran along the arch of its battlements, and communicated by an iron grate to the turret of the postern of the terrace; its opposite end afforded a passage to the high acclivities of the rocks, and led to the causeway that was the only means of admission to the shores.

At no great distance were the remains of a gothic fort, this was the only opening that for many leagues gave an enemy a possibility of landing, as the shore was securely defended by the steep perpendicular cliffs that rose from the surface of the sea, the guards and safety of the albian coast.

The fort was now nearly a ruin, but the gate and lower portcullis were still entire; to these Bertha directed her course, the tide was yet far from the shore, she hesitated not to descend the narrow steep, and after some little difficulty reached the latter; deeply ruminating on her destiny, she proceeded forward.

Forgetful of the distance she had wandered from the castle, she still pursued her walk, till the beams of the setting sun, suddenly bursting from a heavy envelope of dark clouds, enlightened the face of nature with its last departing rays, and roused Bertha from the deep absorption of her mental faculties. She cast her eyes back on the road she had traced, and with astonishment beheld the castle at an immense distance.

The very distance she had strolled from the castle now reminded her of the necessity of her speedy return.

As she was proceeding onwards, the turning of an immense jut of rocks presenting to her view the figures of two men at no great distance ; on their approach she distinguished them by their cloaks to be the same that had once alarmed her in the forest of St. Moreton.

Alarmed at the danger she might be exposed to, from beings whose former converse she had heard enough to excite no very good opinion of their present designs, she considered how to avoid them.

Turning around, she perceived a deep and hollow moss-covered cell that was excavated in the rocks, which seemed to promise concealment ; and hoping they had not noticed her, she hastily ran down the cell, and secreting herself behind a projection of chalk cliff, awaited their departure. But how great was her terror, when the strangers entered the recess, and the tallest casting aside the outward vesture, discovered to the astonished Bertha, the lord Harrold, who with a look of triumph, bent his full dark eyes upon her too expressive to need interpretation.

Bertha shrunk within herself ; and she turned pale at the idea of what might be the consequences, for it was evident he had watched her to this remote and solitary place.

Not long was she kept in doubt ; for Harrold beckoning his colleague, the latter approached, and proceeding up several rough-hewn steps of rock that were placed at the extremity of the cavern, he threw back a small door artfully concealed, and discovered a narrow entry beyond it.

Harrold, taking Bertha nearly in his arms, was led, or rather carried up the steps, and in a moment beheld herself in the interior of a low spacious cavern. The entry was instantly closed, and Hugo disappeared.

The door so much resembled the form of the rock itself, that not the minutest scrutiny could discover that it was otherwise.

From the roof was suspended a tripod silver lamp, which emitted a bright reflection around. The unevenness of the bottom, was filled up by dry sands, and covered with mats, whilst in various recesses were disposed seats, and moss-covered benches. Beneath a grotto stood a table, covered with every delicacy, fruits, viands, and liquors the most delicious.

Bertha notwithstanding her alarm, viewed this scene with silent admiration ; but terror almost overpowered her senses when the conviction darted across them that she was now beyond the reach of aid or pity.

Scarcely had Harrold secured his trembling prey, than seizing both her hands, said—

“The means, charming Bertha, to procure this uninterrupted interview, though violent, are not so intended ; no injury shall be offered, unless provoked by a denial to the demand I am about to make. I adore you with the most ardent love, I will never part from the object I aspire, till, by my tenderest assiduities, I have inspired in that bosom a regard lasting as my own. When the lady Bertha shall bless me with that confession, then shall she be again restored to the world ; but till that happy moment arrives, she must be content to honour

this poor grot with her continued presence, and the society of him who exists but to adore her."

"My lord," replied Bertha firmly, "your demands are such as nature, and the dictates of reason and virtue must for ever forbid. Can you expect a return such as you require, whilst you practise cruelty on its object? or do you think that violence and injustice can enforce a voluntary compliance from a mind conscious of its own integrity and honour,—If your lordship would secure the respect of Bertha, you would do well to remember that the methods you have pursued, are against any expectations you may have entertained of success."

"If I thought that in restoring you to liberty, I should soften your heart in my favour, and weaken its attachment to a hated rival, I would this instant conduct you to the castle. If you will give me a solemn promise that within three days you will here voluntarily meet, and pledge to me your future vows, I will this instant conduct you from this recess."

"Speak!" cried Harrold, impatiently "Do you consent?"

Bertha, with a view of moving him to forbearance, now answered—

My heart is irrevocably engaged and you know the object of its affection. You will admit the justice of my appeal, and cease all further urgings of a suit which I have not power to yield, or you a right to demand."

"I have probed you to the utmost, haughty lady!" replied Harrold, "and find not even danger can bend your obdurate bosom to my wishes. But since you provoke your fate, hear and tremble! You urge your regards for the base-born Alfred, he is the object of my hate, on whom shall fall the full punishment of my slighted love. Let him then beware; I swear to avenge the ruin of my hopes on his accursed head—"

Bertha, terror-struck at the dreadful imprecations, seized his hand, with a look of horror, exclaimed—"Stop, stop your dreadful oath, remember it is your brother!"

"Accursed be the name!" furiously ejaculated Harrold. "This night he shall feel my power, and hear my malediction;"—Then suddenly pausing, he seized her hand, and with calm, deliberate triumph, pronounced—"You will no longer deceive yourself, my charming prize, with a hope of liberty. You will see, by the conveniences here provided," opening a small door of an interior cell, where Bertha with anguish beheld every thing necessary to make this place a continued abode, "that I am prepared for resistance. The present moment gives me to your arms. You have disdained a title that might have been your's; but since not mine, you shall never be the wife of Alfred. This moment gives me excess of bliss and vengeance."

He approached the helpless ensnared victim of his guilty love, and in his looks Bertha saw not an emblem of pity or hope. Retreating from his grasp, she fell on her knees, ejaculated—"Have mercy, and spare me! and at the appointed moment she solemnly swears to become your bride!"

"That offer you have once rejected" replied Harrold; "it will not now be accepted. Shall the despised Harrold receive an heartless hand, whilst a rival brother possesses that envied treasure? No! by the eternal justice of heaven I have sworn that never, while I exist, shall you become the bride of Alfred.

Resistance were useless, and this blissful period gives ample gratification to my love and vengeance."

The soul of Bertha died within her; all hope was at an end. Floods of tears gushed down from her eyes; again she sunk meekly on her knees—

"If pity be not dead within you—if mercy ever had entrance in a heart so cruel, extend it now to the pleadings of a guiltless creature, who supplicates for death, rather than dishonour.—Spare me, as you hope hereafter for mercy and forgiveness!"

Vain were her prayers; the demoniac fury of confessed revenge, and his vicious appetite (for Harrold, resolved on retaliation) hurried him to the commission of a barbarous deed.

He was advancing towards the lost Bertha, when the latter, urged by despair shrieked aloud, and the caverns echoed with her distracted cries for help.

Oh God! what sudden exquisite joy revived the hopeless Bertha, when she heard a well known voice call—"Bertha! lady Bertha! speak again, that the sound of your voice may direct our search!"

"Oh save me, preserve me, save your own poor Bertha!" she exclaimed, in a louder tone; nor could the efforts of Harrold restrain their echoes.

"Hell and furies!" he exclaimed, "am I for ever foiled? and snatching the fainting Bertha in his arms, secreted her in an adjoining division; then furiously drawing his sword, placed himself against the entry, which in an instant was burst open, and Alfred, attended by several of his people rushed into the cell."

"Approach, and you die!" ejaculated Harrold, making a pass with his sword at Alfred, which the latter turned aside, "I will retain my prize against the arms of twenty such brothers."

Alfred, with concern, was now compelled to defend himself against the desperate attacks of Harrold, whose intentions aimed at his life. But watching his opportunity, he, by a sudden movement, disarmed his antagonist; and giving his sword to Sir Walter, rushed to the interior of the cell, and received in his arms his precious deposit; for Bertha was insensible, and had fainted on hearing the clash of arms;—and, in defiance of the efforts of Harrold, bore her to the boat in safety.

Harrold caught with furious grasp the arm of Alfred, and, in a voice hollow by contending rage and passion, pronounced—"TREMBLE!" and darted from the beach.

The air had revived Bertha; and though not yet quite recovered, she heard and saw what had passed. The word "tremble," sunk to her heart in chilling coldness. The bark, however, soon launched into the sea, and the dashing of the waters convinced her that she was beyond the reach of danger.

Alfred, wishing to divert her thoughts, related by what circumstances he had been the means of her rescue.

He had been pursuing his evening's ramble, and was returning home by the sea-sands, when something sparkling attracted his notice, which, on stooping to pick up, he knew to be the bracelet of Bertha; and not doubting but it had



Pub by A. PARK.

47. Leonard St. London.

*Did I not prophesy aright when I said the haughty Bertha
would stoop to supplicate even the pity of*



slipped from her arm in their accustomed walk, he hastened forward, in hopes of overtaking her. But he arrived at the castle without meeting her; and entering the north terrace, was encountered by Sir Walter, who informed him that the Lady Bertha had not yet returned; that as he had observed her from the watch-tower on the sands, a considerable distance from the castle, she had suddenly disappeared behind

a jutting curve of the rocks, and was followed to the same spot by two men, who from their apparent caution, were either foes or smugglers, who often infested the coast.

“I have been watching for some time, my lord,” continued Sir Walter, “but have not yet observed her ladyship.”

No doubt was entertained but some sudden danger had befallen his Bertha; and the impatience of Alfred scarcely admitted the time for procuring such needful aid as could assist his search. Attended by his people, he was rowed to the spot where Sir Walter had beheld her sudden disappearance; and landing, they examined the interior cavern, and searched each little creek and hollow, but to no purpose; when the cries of Bertha through the immense thickness of the

rocky bulwarks, aroused their attention ; and being repeated, guided the noble Alfred to the recess, where, with unfeigned transport, he clasped his Bertha safely in his arms.

Bertha gratefully poured forth her thanks to her deliverer, and to those who accompanied him. With joy she received again the picture of her mother, which she had no doubt Harrold had by some means obtained in the hurry of flying from his pursuit on a former occasion :—she, however, clasped it again on her arm, resolving not to expose the baseness of Harrold to the anger of his brother.

The boat was put to shore beneath the terrace of the castle ; and Bertha beheld herself in the embraces of the Baroness, whose joy was too evident to need expression.

After the timely rescue that Bertha had found in the exertions of Alfred, the latter had endured extreme anxiety ; and shocked at the danger to which she had been exposed from the depravity and cruelty of Harrold, whom as a brother he could not seek to chastise, and dared not lift his arm against, he debated how he might in future guard her from his daring attempts, of which there was too great reason to apprehend the consequences ; and the only alternative that offered, was the hope of an immediate alliance with the lady Bertha, which would at once end all future fears, and give him the long desired claim of calling her for ever his own. With conclusions such as these, he sought the Baroness to insure her influence in his behalf with Bertha ; for well he knew the delicacy of her mind would never admit of his plea, or consent to his entreaties for a secret marriage.

The lady Elvina heard his persuasive arguments in silent emotion and sorrow ; she sighed deeply at the recollection that she now had not power voluntarily to confer happiness on two beings so worthy her nearest regards ; for, acquainted as she was with the favourite projected views of the Baron for the aggrandizement of his family, she trembled to thwart, by her consent to the wishes of her son, the designs of his father ; and though her heart acknowledged the merits of Bertha, yet, under such forbidden auspices, her prudence compelled her to oppose their secret union. Alfred, however, pleaded so powerfully the strength of his passion, and the danger to which the object of his affections was exposed, whilst unprotected against the threatened snares of Harrold, that, together with his determined resolution never to become the husband of Isabella and the pleasing innate satisfaction of being the means of preserving a being so every way deserving her tenderest maternal care, she at length resolved to yield to the only method that offered, to give security to the daughter of her friend, and happiness to her son. It was therefore settled that she should herself be present at their union on this very night ; and at the hour of midnight they were to meet separately in the castle chapel, where her own chaplain was to perform the ceremony.

The last gleams of the declining sun were impatiently watched by Alfred, each moment brought him nearer the bourne of his eager wishes. A streaky redness only bounded the western horizon, and evening began soon to cast her gloomy mantle on the closing prospects of the expiring day. Evening herself declined gently into the thick embraces of night ; and each bosom that was concerned in

the event of the hour of midnight, was variously employed in ruminations on the coming moment, when the shrill horn of the castle proclaimed the approach of strangers.

A trampling of horses sounded on the hollow pavement of the courts, and in a few seconds the Baron with his knights and attendants entered the castle-hall; Bertha felt relieved from a heavy weight of conscious upbraidings. The arrival of the Baron she thought fortunate, as it must undoubtedly postpone the intended interview and marriage, which if deferred till her father's arrival, she should no longer (under his tender approbations) hesitate to give her hand, where her heart was already pledged by honour as well as love.

Alfred, although at first disconcerted and surprised at this unexpected return of the Baron, soon recovered his composure; and softly whispering in the ear of Bertha—"Remember twelve," hastily arose from her side to welcome the Baron.

The Baroness, not expecting her lord so soon, trembled and looked alarmed, whilst in the countenance of the Baron were displayed strong marks of scrutiny and anger.

Bertha soon took an opportunity to retire unperceived to her own apartments, where she found Ruth, who gave her a folded paper, she read these words—

"Be courageous, my adored Bertha, nor disappoint the hopes of your expecting Alfred. Remember that he waits with Father Benedine for your promised attendance at the chapel; and as you value his future peace and happiness, fail not to bless him with the wished-for moment that insures you his for ever.

"ALFRED."

She laid down the paper with a variety of sensations too indescribable to be explained. Her destiny was then beyond recal; and since it was not possible for her to retract, she resolved not to express any outward disapprobation, but to assume as much composure as her agitated feelings would admit of.

The clock, however, chimed the hour of twelve ere she had reasoned herself into sufficient resolution to enable her not to disappoint the expectations she had raised. At length she arose, and Ruth, covering her with a thick veil, she tremblingly took the arm of her attendant, and entered the gallery. All around was still, and the hall below obscured in total darkness.

Ruth shook and trembled with terror as they proceeded; for the only road safe from discovery was down the eastern corridor, and of necessity they must pass the great portal of the haunted chambers. The eastern towers adjoined the church, divided from the main buildings by a flight of stairs and a vestibule piazza that ran along one side of the ramparts. They were hastily proceeding down the corridor, and had passed the door of the dreaded chamber, when Bertha, impelled by a forgetful curiosity, cast her eyes on the portal, and aghast she viewed its door slowly open, and a face of deadly hue appeared in the half-opened interspace. For a moment it fixed a ghastly, appalling frown on the affrighted Bertha, and vanished within the portal, which as instantly closed with quickness.

Happily for Bertha, terror had robbed her of all power of speech; and she was on the point of rushing back to her own apartments, when she observed that Ruth had not witnessed the dreadful spectacle. Assuming a desperate courage,

she flew past the tremendous door, and hurrying down the stairs, sunk, at length upon the balustrade, fainting and exhausted.

A distant approaching light, however, aroused her, and soon after the impatient Alfred appeared. His cheering voice were never more gratefully received, nor ever more needed by Bertha, who, restored to composure, had resolution to avoid informing him of the horrid apparition she had witnessed.

Alfred now supported her through the vestibule, and passing beneath a small open postern, arrived at the chapel gates in silence. Conducted to the foot of the altar, Bertha bowed meekly to the Father, but trembled too much to trust her voice to speak. He blessed her, and she then anxiously cast her eyes around.

“Will not the Baroness be present?” she asked, in a low tremulous tone perceiving her not in the chapel.

“Be not alarmed at her absence,” replied Alfred; “the sudden, unexpected return of the Baron might have rendered it dangerous to us all, had she quitted her apartments, and have occasioned suspicions that would have proved detrimental to our little scheme of happiness.”

Bertha saw the necessity of the Baroness’s absence, and acquiesced in its propriety, she prepared to receive the solemn vow, and Father Benedine began the marriage ceremony.

When he reached that passage where the necessary questions are asking, Alfred was answering in the affirmative, when a sudden glare of light flashed along the gothic roof of the church, which in a moment was filled with several people, and a voice from among them loudly exclaimed,—“Desist, I command you, or meet a father’s malediction!”

The appearance of the Baron put an instant stop to the nearly concluded ceremony, and Bertha sunk silently to the earth, insensible to all around her.

The Baron approached the altar, and sternly commanded his people to take the fainting lady Bertha to her own chamber. Then fixing on lord Alfred a calm, determined look, said—

“Degenerate boy! from you I never expected a conduct so opposite to my wishes: be assured, she who has seduced your boyish fancy, and artfully ensnared your affections, shall never be the wife of a son of mine. Retire, my Lord, and in private teach your heart obedience to my wishes. My word you well know is pledged for your alliance with the Countess of Claudale; prepare, therefore to receive, within three days, the hand of Isabella, or meet the eternal displeasure of your father by refusal.”

“My lord,” interrupted Alfred, “you are well assured I will not dissemble, nor condescend to deceive you, when I solemnly declare that no command, either of duty or affection, power or anger, shall force me to resign those claims to the lady Bertha, which I have ratified by sacred vows; nor can you hope I will basely recal my plighted faith, to become the husband of the lady Isabella. The ceremony which you have interrupted, though not entirely consummated, will by me be held solemn and irrevocable; and in the presence of yourself and this holy Father, swear never to break to her my blighted affections, or permit myself to become the husband of another, on any consideration whatever.”

Alfred quitted the altar and sought the chamber of Bertha, whom he found

recovering her almost fleeting spirits; at the sight of Alfred she sighed as she ejaculated—

“Leave me, my lord, do not by your presence increase the painful sensations I now endure, but quit me for ever, and forget that such a being as Bertha ever existed.”

“Forget you!” exclaimed Alfred, “impossible! you are my wife, more dear to me than life itself, I will never leave you! let us quit this castle, dear Bertha, for a place of greater security, where the ceremony may be again repeated, safe from interruptions.”

“I entreat,” ejaculated Bertha. “Urge me no more, I have been wrong, my reason was blinded by a prospect of attainable happiness; I will not force myself on a noble house, whose head has forbidden our union. I conjure you, leave me, nor by your stay morose the misery of this prohibited interview.”

Bertha with persuasive arguments, though she felt keenly the sacrifice, convinced Alfred of the necessity of this parting, to which he unwillingly assented, after a promise that she would meet him the next evening in the library.

Dejected and unhappy, she passed a restless night; she spent the succeeding morning preparing for her secret return to the Abbey. She commissioned Ruth, with instructions to Adrian, to have the horses ready at the postern beneath the terrace that opened among the cliffs. She wrote a few lines to the Baroness, thanking her for her kind protection, and that her removal from the castle, was indispensable and pressing. Having folded the letter, and placed it on the cabinet she felt she had acted right whatever might be the event.

Evening had come, and she now grew impatient, but Ruth came not, when the door softly opened, she was hastily throwing her veil over her shoulders to quit the castle, when she beheld not Ruth, but the Baron, overpowered at the sight of a visitor so unexpected: she stood for some moment mute; but recovering her self respect she coldly demanded, what motive she was to attribute the honour of so unexpected an interview.

The baron appeared troubled and uneasy, as with profound respect, he thus began—

“Will the lovely lady Bertha, forgive the selfish man whom she must view with justly excited aversion and hatred: do not judge too harshly my proceedings; for had my son earlier made known to me his choice, I should not have pledged my word to my departed friend for his alliance with his daughter; and though I regret the unhappy event, yet is my honour given, beyond my power of recal.”

To have been envied the bride of lord Alfred,” replied Bertha, “was a presumptuous aspiration; but I have atoned for my error. I shall shortly quit the castle, with the assurance that under such circumstances, the lord Alfred is free from his engagements to me. I presume your lordship is satisfied.”

The Baron took his leave.

Agitated with contending struggles, Bertha descended to the hall. The Baroness was present, her pale looks, bespoke the anguish of her mind at the dangerous task Alfred had imposed on himself; and when the hour of his retirement arrived, he arose to quit the hall. The Baroness ejaculated—

“Heaven guard my son!” and sunk fearfully into the arms of Bertha, and was borne from the banquet to her own chamber.

CHAPTER XI.

ALFRED, as he quitted the hall, recalled to his mind the anguish he had, during the hour of banquet, observed in the countenance of his lovely Bertha ; and once he even perceived the tear start to her eye, which, when she found he had noticed, she struggled to suppress ; almost resolved him to abandon to some future opportunity, the enterprise he had engaged in.

But his dread of exciting the ridicule of the Baron conquered this hesitation of love's alarms ! and taking the lamp from one of the trembling attendants, he pursued undauntedly his way to the eastern towers.

From what uncommon cause Alfred knew not, (for he was incapable of personal fear), but as he reached the door, a sudden spasm seized with benumbing coldness his heart, and the quick pulsation of its movements for some instants entirely ceased ; he felt it was not fear, but the sensation was new, and never before experienced. For a moment he slightly felt himself overcome by a superstitious kind of awe that seemed to forbid his entering these desolated chambers ; but after a short debate with his reason and his courage, he shook off the enfeebling presentiment of evil, ashamed of having yielded to a momentary alarm, so weak and unfounded. Drawing his sword, he inwardly ejaculated—

If there be a supernatural mystery in those old chambers, it is for the honour of my father's house that I search into its cause. Convinced of the rectitude of my intentions, I will proceed cheerfully in the enterprise, remembering that he who suffers not the sparrow's fall without his special leave, will also guard me in the moment of peril.

Re-animated by the foregoing reflections, he approached the gothic portal, fixed the key within its rusty holds, and with some little exertion turned it in its wards, when the door slowly grating on its hinges, displayed the glooms of the chamber within, whose murky and even terrific aspect seemed to frown upon the bold intruder.

The first, and the one beyond it, as he examined these desolate ruined apartments, were spacious, lofty, and extensive ; the floors were covered with a thick incrustation of damp and dust, mildewed to a hard substance, which rendered it slippery, and dangerous for the feet to tread upon.

A few remnants of antique furniture were placed in the recesses, and the windows were nearly stripped of the small girt casements.

Alfred's spirits felt the effect of this gloomy scene ; Shuddering, he scarce knew why, he crossed another chamber in like desolation and ruin with the former. Having here found little to engage attention, he proceeded to an opposite door, which stood half open, and after a little hesitation, entered what appeared to have once been a state bed-chamber ; but its freezing dampness struck coldly

to the heart of Alfred, whilst its decaying dilapidated state, its shattered and crumbling furniture, together with the narrow pointed vaulted casements, the many recesses of the walls seemed to point it out as a place well calculated to conjure up appalling ideas of dreadful deeds. The small high windows were secured from all access by cross bars of iron, that reached from the ceiling of the chamber to the floor, and seemed the only emblems of strength that were capable of resistance.

“In this very apartment,” mentally ejaculated Alfred, “recorded history relates duke Richard was confined, and in this place according to ancient belief, murdered!”

He started at the thought; and as he sighed over the fate of the unfortunate prince, fancied his sigh was re-echoed, and for a moment he listened in mute suspended attention, but all was silent as death, and he concluded that it was the desolate forlornness of the place that had raised imaginary fantasies.

Approaching the heavy canopied bed, and holding his lamp still nearer to its grandeur, he was surprised to find that it was by no means in a corresponding state of ruin with the other parts of the room.

The hangings and drapery were of dark green velvet, lined with a dingy coloured satin that once had been white, and edged with a deep fringe of gold; the bed itself was covered with what had once been a richly embroidered white velvet coverlid, but the bright beauties of its varied colours were now entirely destroyed, and dust, age, and mildew had nearly reduced it to disgusting tatters.

For some time Alfred stood contemplating this wreck of majesty.—“Once,” he reflected, “these desolate ruins were the scene of beauty and pleasing tumult; they have glittered in the sunshine of prosperity, and, like their last inhabitant shone bright in the glare of regal pomp and greatness. Alas! how fallen! Where now is the moving spring that gave life and animation to all around.

How transitory and short-lived are all the pleasure of this life. Alfred found that these melancholy scenes excited reflections rather opposite to the courage necessary for the occasion; and to divert his thoughts, he quitted the couch, and proceeded in his examination of the room.

Some antique remnants of furniture leaned for support against the walls of the recesses, and near the black marble fire-place stood a once richly embossed table; closely adjoining it was placed a high-backed chair of state. It stood in a position that seemed to declare it had never been moved from the exact station that it had been left in by the last solitary inhabitant of this now gloomy chamber.

The dark green velvet curtains that hung in fragments against the broken casements, were agitated by the wind; and the window being lower and larger than the others, Alfred made a ladder of the cross iron gratings that extended to the ground, and climbing to the top of the window space, had a faint view of the sky and the distant prospect bounded by the forest tops and the steeps of the northern mountains.

While thus engaged, he was startled by the faint echoes of a noise like the closing of a door, which sounded as if it proceeded from the rooms beneath. For some time he remained in suspense as to the cause of it, till he concluded that it

was perhaps the wind which being now tremendous, had forced itself through some hollow inlet, and blown to the door of some distant room that had been left open in the chambers below.

Satisfied with this very possible conclusion he suffered not his mind to receive alarm from a circumstance so easily reconciled; and having closed the door of the chamber, began to search the walls, to see if in any of their recesses there were any concealed divisions he had not yet discovered; when, holding the light beneath a heavy vaulted arch, he perceived a cabinet of ebony, enwrought with ivory and golden fretwork.

The key still remaining, induced Alfred to turn it in its rusty wards, and the small folding doors opening, discovered several drawers and inner compartments; when touching a small piece of iron, which was a spring-lock, he pressed it forcibly, and the lid of the cabinet unfastening, he found it was designed for a shallow deception of the well that it concealed; his curiosity being excited, he determined to pursue its gratification; "for at least," he reflected, "here may be something to challenge scrutiny."

The whole of the interior appeared in high preservation. Pressing his hand upon a sliding panel, it gave way, and he discovered another well, in which he beheld several precious ornaments, jewels, and valuables; but looking still further, he found a small bundle of papers, which holding nearer to the light, displayed on the outward envelope several legible written characters.

His curiosity was now strongly engaged to know their contents, he hastily took possession of the great high-backed chair, and drawing it still nearer the lamp, which he retrimmed, he perused with horror and astonishment, the dark-meaning contents.

Starting with amazed suspense, he exclaimed, "Great God! what mysterious words are here!"—With eager attention he perceived written, in evident uncertainty, the names of beings whose possessors made him tremble at their guilt. The first sensations of his astonishment subsiding at the dark discovery, now induced him to begin regularly the perusal of this mystery and dreadful suffering; and so deeply was his attention engaged, that he forgot his gloomy situation, and even his appointment with his loved Bertha.

Neither did he hear the noise that disturbed the stillness of all around, nor see the terrific opening of the floor in a distant corner of the dreary chamber, and admitted a figure which, as it approached, fixed its eyes full upon the deeply engaged Alfred; who was not disturbed till the sudden removal of his sword from the table where he had placed it: but he now found it presented to his own breast, whilst a voice pronounced, in direful and deadly sounds,—“TREMBLE?”

The well remembered tones and never to be forgotten expression were again for the second time repeated, appalled the heart of Alfred. Slowly lifting up his eyes, he beheld no spectre, but a being whose dark intents were for more dreadful than all the imagery of supernatural vision could conceive, for they were fixed on the terrific countenance of a brother, in whose stern features he plainly read his destiny.

The natural firmness of his heart, did not desert him; and he was rising with seeming outward composure, when Harrold, presenting the sword to the heart of its master, slowly pronounced—



“Stir not! speak not! attempt not to make the slightest noise or movement from this place, for never shall you pass the bourn of these chambers living!”

Horror and despair now seized the noble Alfred; he saw his doom. His sword was in the hands of his deadly foe; and at a short distance stood Hugo, armed with a bow and arrow.

Harrold with savage triumph looked at his brother and said—“The hour of thy fate is arrived. From the days of infancy I detested thee, thou wert the bane of my ambition.—But for thee, the heiress of Clandale had been mine; and the enslaving Bertha given me perfect happiness. Wretch! does not thy soul shrink within thee. Harrold bids thee despair: thyself has wrought the ruin that awaits thee.”

“I never injured thee,” cried Alfred.

“Ah! never injured me!” interrupted Harrold, “Insolent boy behold thy death,” drawing a dagger from his belt. “This moment is thy last; this moment gives me vengeance.”

“Heaven have mercy on me!” cried Alfred.

“Down, down for ever” exclaimed the fratricide, plunging his dagger to the heart of his victim. He threw him to the ground. In that moment a piercing shriek ran echoing through the chamber. A form clothed in white, rushed into the room and sunk motionless upon the bleeding body. Remorse now seized

the soul of Harrold. For a moment he hung over the bodies and in half-suppressed accents exclaimed.—“What have I done? Whom have I slain? a brother! 'Tis oh God! a brother that never injured me!—Such are the damned curses of avarice and aspiring ambition!”

To account for the unexpected appearance of Bertha at a time of such horror, was oppressed by a deep and heavy slumber, the image of a terrific dream distracted her sleeping senses, and she beheld the two strangers who had first alarmed her in the forest, and in her vision were again repeated; the scene then changed to the interior of the eastern chamber, she saw the dreadful action there performed. A piercing shriek awoke her from the dreadful vision. She flew to the scene of horror, and became at once mercifully insensible to her own misery.

The safety of Harrold aroused him to the necessary consideration that Bertha had been an innocent witness to his guilt, he trembled at the danger of a discovery; there was but one way left to make all safe: the dead reveals no secrets, and he paused upon the dreadful alternative.

The day faintly broke, and still found Harrold undetermined. At length, however, the point of his dagger was entering the bosom of Bertha, when she gave signs of returning animation; a deep sigh told she breathed, and she slowly raised her dejected frame.

Raising herself on her knees, but still hanging over the bleeding corpse, she faintly ejaculated,—

“It was your brother, Harrold! Great God! your own brother,” and she fell again on the body, regardless of all around.

Harrold now determined on her fate, he shook the arm of Bertha and loudly exclaimed—

“Bertha, awake! awake, I say, and listen to the only alternative to preserve existence, swear, by every tie divine and human, by all the future fears of punishment, never to betray my fatal secret, this swear, as thou hopest for mercy;”

Bertha awoke to consciousness, faintly articulated, “spare me!”

“Take the oath demanded!” furiously exclaimed Harrold.

“Will *nothing* but an oath preserve me?”

“*Nothing*!” he added, with a determined tone of voice.

An instinctive hope, made her turn her eyes towards the door for succour, then wildly round the room, till she again rested on the murdered Alfred; she would have fallen, but was held in the arms of the murderer whilst the horrid oath was administered, and the words—

“*I swear!*” escaped her lips; and she became, in an instant after, as motionless as the murdered Alfred.

Harrold, commanded Hugo to remove the body, and close up the apartment, then taking the insensible Bertha in his arms to the secret way by which he had entered, bearing his hapless burthen from the scene of death and murder.

CHAPTER XII.

THE next morning all was terror and confusion at the castle. Neither Alfred nor Bertha could be found, the baron concluded they had left together, he flew to the chamber of the latter. But his search was vain: and only the letter addressed the preceding day to the baroness, remained to explain the mystery. This he tore open and read,—“ From pressing necessity, she had quitted the castle; which though now concealed, deserves not to render her less worthy your esteem and love. Adieu! Mother of God protect you!”

The baron was now confirmed in his suspicions; he had not the least doubt but she was accompanied by Alfred, his son. At length the baron determined on an instant search through the castle, but an attendant entering, presented a folded paper, found in the apartments of Alfred. The baron snatched it eagerly, and thus perused:—

‘ I have flown for ever from your sight! you have deprived your son of all that can make life desirable; in future we are sundered for eternity. The domains of Etherwold I bequeath to my *Brother Harrold*, never will you behold your wretched outcast.

ALFRED.’

The baron’s mind was agitated, with the deepest anxiety the whole day, for the return of his son. He hastened to lady Isabella. She met him with emotion of soul though her pride disdained to show her real feeling, at length she severely said—

“ The meaning of this flight my lord is to avoid a union with the despised, rejected Isabella? The lady Bertha is, ere this, the bride of my lord Alfred.”

“ My curse light upon them, if it so proves,” furiously ejaculated the baron.

The lady Isabella was of a temper too imperious to stoop to complaints, she replied majestically “ My lord you must forgive if without your leave, I insist on my departure from the castle. I cannot stoop to sue where I have a right to exact obedience, I have humbled myself in my compliance to your lordship’s wishes to your youngest son. I never will accept the hand of lord Harrold; I shall seek a retreat in my own possessions, free from that shame, I have endured here!” she then, bowing to the baron quitted the apartment, and shortly after left the castle.

We now return to Harrold who, bore his insensible burden across the dreary chamber, and descending the secret trap, rested Bertha on a stone seat, till she had recovered from her torpid lethargy.

At length a deep sigh gave token of returning animation: and, opening her eyes, she found herself supported by Harrold, enclosed in a dreary vault.

She attempted to liberate herself, impelled by instinctive loathing. She arose with disordered wildness, and darting along the caverned passages of the earth, till she found herself in total darkness, when at the turning of a projection of rocks, the light carried by Harrold flashed through the passage, as he loudly exclaimed—"Stop! or you will plunge to eternal destruction!" Bertha passively waited his nearer approach, and became sensible she stood on the brink of a seemingly bottomless abyss.

Harrold now took the hand of Bertha, regardless of her struggles, and led her down a flight of rude stairs, that were cut in the rocks, every step they took threatened to plunge them into the gulph below. At length they placed their feet upon a narrow platform, raised across the abyss, and again regaining the basis of the solid rock, they in silence continued to trace an immense track of rocky cavities.

The wretched Bertha, now became nearly unable to move,—“I can go no further,” she despairingly exclaimed—“let me here expire in peace!”

“Remember your oath!” furiously exclaimed Harrold, “on the subject of this night’s events be dumb for ever, should a word pass your lips, you shall feel *my* vengeance.”

“I am already your victim,” she faintly replied “you cannot inflict greater misery than I now suffer.”

The deep branching recesses of the caverns now began to lesson; and soon after the exhausted Bertha, perceived a small iron grated door near the extremity of the cavern! which being opened, she found herself in a wide extended place; and as her eyes glanced round, piles of mouldering coffins met her view. The horrors of this dismal scene, and the ghastly sight of the remains of human skeletons that lay scattered in the pathway, together with the confined human vapours, subdued the last struggling efforts of nature; the spirits of Bertha fled: she fell insensible amidst the appalling objects that surrounded her. The hideous scene was closed from her horror-struck sight, and these regions of death and eternity she no more beheld.

How long Bertha continued insensible, is uncertain; but on awakening from her trance of terror, she found herself in a purer atmosphere; and the bright illuminations of day had chased the former darkness from her memory.

As she cast her eyes around, they rested on objects familiar to her sight; she was enabled to distinguish that she was now within the walls of the old detached library of Brandon Abbey. Her mind, however, was too unsettled to feel either pleasure or astonishment, she arose from the seat on which she had reclined, and moved toward the door of the chamber, which opening, gave her admission to the south-west gallery, that led to the private turret chamber of her father. With forlorn, uneven steps, she ascended the spiral stairs, and found herself once more in the apartment of Sir Godfrey.

“Ah, my beloved parent!” she exclaimed aloud in anguish, “how little did you think I should so soon experience the mournful certainty of your words!”

“Bertha!” cried a feeble voice, in a tone of enquiry—“Bertha!”

A sudden gleam of despairing pleasure illuminated the sad features of Bertha; the voice was nature’s self speaking in thrilling accents to her aching heart, and

she hastily passed through the open door of the sleeping chamber of Sir Godfrey.

She cast her eyes around, but saw not what she sought.

“Is it delusion,” she cried, impatiently lifting up the hangings that were closed round the lofty canopy of the bed. But ah, miserable child! what complicated increase of woe awaits thy anguished sight!

Her ear had not deceived her, and she had heard her father’s voice. He lay reclined upon the bed, not in ease and health, but fast sinking to his eternal rest.

“Oh God! Oh God! what new anguish oppresses me!—My father!” she exclaimed, sinking into his dying arms, “Oh my father, stay and take me with you!”

The paleness of his countenance, had struck the agony of conviction to her benumbed senses, that he was past recal. A piercing shriek rung echoing through the chamber. Sir Godfrey was indeed within a few moments of ceasing to exist.

As soon as the weeping attendants had recovered Bertha, she placed herself upon her knees beside the bed, and listened with silence to the words of her dying parent.

“My Child, spare me the excruciating addition of witnessing your unavailing agony. I bless providence that has once more restored you to my sight. I have much to reveal, but speech, I fear, will be denied me. When I shall be no more, open the cabinet in yonder closet, and you will there find the last memorial of my wishes for your welfare:—you will there receive the clue that will unfold the mystery of your own and your father’s sorrowing fate. I exact no further surety than your promise to obey implicitly the directions contained in the papers. You are the heiress of this Abbey, and all its lands. Should your title be disputed, then search for the papers which relate to your future rights, according to the directions contained in the memorial you will find in the cabinet: they are concealed with the others in the secret repository beneath the ruined cloisters, and will amply repay the search.—Bless thee, my child!—Shun the—the house of Nev——Neville: Beware of——Oh!”——With a faint sigh the breath of life escaped, and the suffering Sir Godfrey rested in peace for ever.”

Bertha was carried, insensible and passive, from the chamber of the deceased to her own.

On the following night Sir Godfrey was committed to the earth. A train of Monks and Choristers from the Abbey of St. Austin, arrived to pay the last respectful office to his remains, and he was borne to the Abbey church, where he had particularly desired to be interred.

Bertha, whom no entreaties could prevent from attending this last solemn duty, supported the painful scene with heroism. The ceremony ended, she sunk beside the grave, and inwardly ejaculating a prayer for the peace of the departed, raised in her hand the earth that had been thrown upon the coffin, to her lips, which kissing, she again let fall, exclaiming,—

“Farewell my father, my friend, my only comforter, farewell for ever! We meet no more in this, but in a better world our happiness will be immutable.”

When time had in a great measure overcome the violence of her sorrow,

Bertha summoned Oswald, to inquire of him her father's actions during his absence, and the cause that hurried him back to breath his last sigh, on the morn of his return.

"Alas, my lady!" replied Oswald, "'tis a sad subject; Sir Godfrey, from his anxiety to arrive at the end of his journey, had exerted himself beyond his shattered strength. He had nearly accomplished it, when he was overcome with the exertion he had made, and he lay dangerously ill. The delay was death to the success of the cause he had embarked in, and the consequences proved fatal to his life; for his disappointment in being unable to pursue his journey to the end, so greatly deranged his intellects, that for many days rendered him insensible. In one of his most lucid intervals, the mysterious stranger again appeared, and was shut up with him in private conference:—the subject of their discourse is unknown, but, on his departure, Sir Godfrey commanded their immediate return to the Abbey. The effects of the stranger's visit had operated dreadfully; and with alarm, he perceived the sudden change it had produced. Sir Godfrey, conscious of his approaching dissolution, increased his malady by the fears and agonies he endured on his daughter's account; and anxious to behold her once again, he quickened the last moments of life by the fatigues he underwent in being carried again to the Abbey: where, by care and attention he was brought and lodged in his own chamber, whilst a messenger, sent to the castle, was ordered to hasten the return of Bertha, who arrived there nearly at the time that the unhappy sufferer was conducted through the vaults of the castle, which had a communication with those of the Abbey; and hence it was that the dying Sir Godfrey was saved the distress, had he known the dreadful scenes to which his loved child had been exposed.

With the sudden misfortune of her father's death, expired every hope of discovering the mystery of her own and his disastrous fate: the long-hidden secret ended in obscurity; and every vestige of its cause seemed buried in his grave.

She questioned Oswald, if her father had expressed any wish that he might desire to have fulfilled:—

"No, my lady," replied Oswald; "he indeed one day called me to his bedside, and bade me never desert my young mistress when he was gone! I could not speak, my lady, but he seemed satisfied and bade me not grieve him by my sorrow. He said that your ladyship should know all if he lived to return to the Abbey; but if he did not, he charged me to remind you to open the cabinet as soon as he was buried."

Bertha remembered she had too long delayed this enjoined duty, and she resolved this night to perform it. As soon as the inhabitants of the Abbey had retired, and sleep had closed every eye, she took her lamp, and quitting her apartment, approached that of Sir Godfrey's. At the door of which she paused, and it was some moments before she could find resolution to open it:—at length she entered. The silent stillness and solemn melancholy that reigned around, increased the sad dejection of her spirits; she shuddered as she cast a fearful glance upon the dark-covered bed; she crossed the now forlorn apartment, and entered the lesser closet, where stood the cabinet.

Having opened the cabinet, and searched for the papers concealed in the

drawers, she drew a chair to the table, began to peruse the first, which contained these emphatic words:—

“Be cautioned against the taking of enforced oaths, for they are the sure ministers of dishonour, and lead to misery and destruction.—Such, Oh my child! are the causes of your own and your father’s ruin!”

* * * * *

Bertha shuddered: and her blood chilled within her veins as she recalled the horrid vow she had been compelled to take.

“Merciful God!” she exclaimed, “for what am I reserved?—My father was the victim of forced vows, and his wretched child now doubly inherits them!”

Laying this paper aside, she opened another; its contents ran thus:—

“My child, should I not return alive, those instructions will guide you to the means of recovering, at full, the story of your father’s wrongs, which now lie concealed, with the deeds and writings concerning the Abbey, in an iron chest, of which the key is enclosed.”

* * * * *

Bertha searched among the papers, but could not find any key, or the instructions mentioned by her father, for the sheets seemed to have been torn, for several paragraphs, so that the connexion was destroyed from the preceding parts. She concluded that some person had gained access to the cabinet, whose motives for such proceedings served to convince her that she had an unknown foe, whose dangerous sting she must guard against, and who was doubtless, the cause of her father’s sorrows and mysterious actions. She again examined the torn papers, but those that were not destroyed, had no relation to her present search. The only one that claimed her attention, was dated on the night of her father’s departure, it ran thus—

“My child will only be secure from the designs of the heiress of Neville, in the guardianship and protection of the baron and baroness of Wilden. The latter is acquainted with some part of my concerns, but the seal of secrecy binds her to silence. Give into her possession all the papers you will find in the iron chest, when you have discovered them.”

* * * * *

A deep groan escaped her, at the thoughts of returning to the terrific castle.

At length, she returned to the perusal of the paper, which finished with instructions where to find her mother’s jewels, and some other valuables, that would be needful witnesses of her claims at a future period. These he advised her to remove to the iron chest as soon as found, which, with a sum of money, were now deposited in the secret drawers of the cabinet.

Bertha opened the division described; she there found her father’s picture, and a very considerable sum of money; but her most minute search could not enable her to discover the other valuables, which had evidently been removed.

Bertha sighed at this unexpected destruction of her expectations; the papers she was to search for, were, she well knew, concealed in some recess in the vaults of the Abbey; but in what direction they were situated, or where she was to seek for them, was a difficulty no effort could lead to the hope of overcoming.

The necessity of her quitting the Abbey for the safer protection of the castle,

however, now forcibly struck her ; she considered that, by staying longer, she might expose herself to fresh dangers.

With a sigh, that expressed her hopeless state ever of obtaining a light upon this mystery, she closed the cabinet, and quitting the chamber, was about to recross the other, when she thought she caught a sight of a gliding form. Concluding that the state of her mind had worked up her imagination, she was leaving the apartment, when a deep echoing sigh broke upon her ear, and a deep toned, hollow voice pronounced, in slow and piercing accents—

“ Shun the dangers which here await you, and quit the Abbey ere you become its prisoner. ”

Bertha was now convinced that she had not been deceived ; and the terrible certainty that the apartments were the resort of some being, almost overpowered her, and she sunk, over-whelmed with affright, upon the seat once occupied by Sir Godfrey, waiting, in dread expectancy, the appearance of an awful apparition.

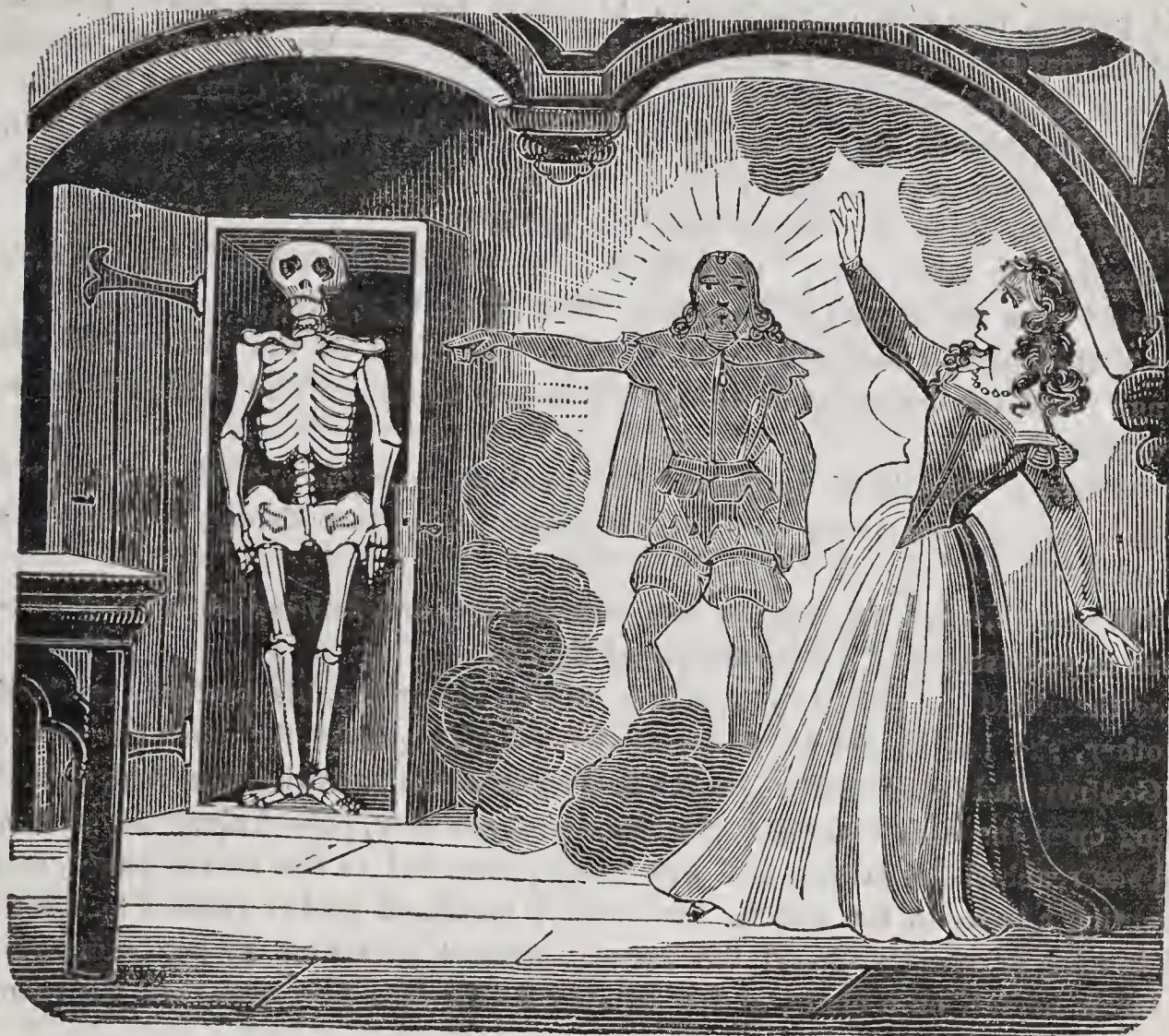
Some moments passed in fearful suspense, but silence reigned around. A little re-animated, she arose from her seat, and as fast as her terror would permit, left the room ; then hastily fastening the door, she glided swiftly across the corridors, and entered once more her own apartments.

CHAPTER XIII.

IT was some time before Bertha regained composure of mind ; and as she reclined upon her couch, she deeply reflected upon the late terrific scene. The voice she had heard, she felt convinced proceeded from the spirit of her deceased parent ! and as this idea gained ground in her mind, it became a melancholy means of comfort and resignation to her speedy departure from the Abbey.

The baron of Wilden, when informed of Sir Godfrey's death and Bertha's flight, though still at a loss to conjecture the cause of her so privately absenting herself from the castle, experienced an unfeigned joy in the certainty that she had flown no further than the Abbey, and really unaccompanied by his son. And now that he found Bertha was bequeathed by her father to the care of the baroness, and that in the will of the deceased his own name had been slightly mentioned as a mark of respect, he resolved to exert that authority which Sir Godfrey had only intended to be executed by the baroness, and, investing himself with the usurped guardianship of his daughter, claim a right over her actions.

In the name, therefore, of Elvina, he had repeatedly sent to the Abbey, to



request her return to the castle: but Bertha shuddering at its mention, had still lingered from week to week, and delayed her unwilling removal: but the supernatural warning she had received, made her resolve to depart on the following morning: but on the return of Oswell, (who had been to the castle to signify her intentions) he informed her that it had become the seat of war. Queen Margaret having beat the Yorkists, in a late battle, and who had flown thither for shelter, was preparing to besiege their nearly impregnable fortress. She therefore delayed quitting the Abbey.

After some few days had passed, and night was far advanced, a loud knocking at the south gates of the Abbey, alarmed the affrighted household. The knocking continuing, Bertha commanded that entrance should be given to the strangers.

“Surely you do not mean to open the gates at this time of night my lady,” replied Oswell. “I dare not do it.”

“Then I will!” exclaimed Bertha.

She was about to open the gates, but with caution she demanded the business of the strangers.

A female voice replied, “We are pursued by enemies, and *demand* a shelter. Quick!”

Bertha with difficulty drew back the bolts, and she beheld a lady of tall, ma-

jestic person, who held by the hand a blooming boy; she wore silver armour studded, that enclosed her waist and arms, and upon her brow a helmet, whose crest was covered with a plume of feathers: her face seemed clouded by grief, and disappointment. She examined the features of Bertha, "There is an open sincerity in your aspect, that tells me I may rely on your truth," she said. "Say can you afford us a shelter from our pursuers?"

"Such safety noble lady," replied Bertha "as the Abbey affords, you may command from the orphan of Brandon. Follow me to the vaulted vestibule."

At that moment a confused sound of voices was heard in the hall beyond the passage; and the domestics in affright exclaimed aloud—"The Abbey is beset by soldiers!"

"Oh God;" ejaculated the lady, "the traitors have discovered us, and we are lost, save us! save your queen—your prince, who now demands your duty and fidelity."

"Have faith, royal madam, in your true subject, and rely on her willing obedience in your service," softly whispered Bertha.

She then held the prince by one arm, whilst the queen, his mother, retained the other, she hastily led them across the church; gained the chamber where Sir Godfrey had found shelter, on the first night of his arrival at the Abbey, and forcing open the door that led to the south-west corridor, passed along the gallery until she reached the saloon, and with haste proceeded to the secret panel, and presenting a taper to the queen, she silently motioned for her visitors to enter: and bowing reverently closed the panel. Almost overcome by her exertions, she threw herself on a chair, at the instant that the door flew open, and the room became filled with armed men.

"This is the place I saw them enter," exclaimed a tall warrior, who seemed the leader of the band—"Search friends! be not alarmed, lady, we pursued Margaret and her son from yonder gallery to this door: nor could they have passed here without your knowledge."

"Stranger!" replied Bertha, "two such persons as you describe, hastily passed through this chamber, but whither they have gone, I know not." In this Bertha erred not, for she had never entered the secret passage.

"Search the Abbey," he exclaimed to his ferocious companions, and seizing the hand of Bertha, was hurrying her out of the chamber, when the baron of Etherwold entered.

"Forbear this violence!" he exclaimed, "The lady Bertha is my ward;" then turning to Bertha, he enquired where she had secreted the usurpers:

I am at this moment, my lord, unacquainted with the steps of the queen and her son, nor can I direct your pursuit."

The baron viewed with disappointment the firmness of Bertha. He had entered the Abbey a conqueror, insolently triumphing over the unfortunate foe: for Margaret had too prematurely hastened the siege of his impregnable castle, ere the arrival of forces from the king came to strengthen her own army, were routed and the leader chased from the field of battle, whilst the queen and her son were pursued to the very doors of the Abbey, and but for Bertha, must have fallen into the hands of her enemies. The baron after a pause, said:—

“’Tis in vain longer to conceal them from our search. We are well assured the fugitives have here found refuge: should you persist in secreting them the consequences may prove fatal to your interests.”

“My lord,” replied Bertha, “I will cheerfully conduct you through every chamber of the Abbey; if at the end you find not the objects of your search, you will I trust acquit me of deception.”

The baron after a pause, dismissing his train from the apartments, took the hand of Bertha, said—“I will not constrain you to the fulfilment of your own proposal, but as your residence has been invaded, and cannot in future afford you a secure, undisturbed shelter from the ravages of war, permit me to attend you to the castle of Etherwold; the baroness will rejoice to behold her lovely ward’s return.

A decree so settled, admitted no repeal: and unprepared as Bertha was for so sudden a departure from the Abbey, which might be again exposed to the daring violence of its fierce marauders, whilst the impossibility of affording succour to the royal fugitives, almost overwhelmed her with dread and terror for the consequences that might ensue as soon as she had quitted the mansion; for she found from the resolute manner of the baron, he was not prepared to admit of any plea for her longer denial of his request, and she dared not insist on her stay, lest it should excite suspicions that might prove injurious to the distressed queen, and lead to a secret of yet greater scrutiny: she therefore with much reluctance was led by the baron through the hall, towards the forest, and passed the second court of the Abbey, of which Bertha took a painful look of regret, and was hurried almost immediately from its sight.

It was too late in the night, ere they arrived at the castle, to expect to see the baroness: she returned the baron’s salute, and hastened to her former chamber. On that dreadful night, so fatal to the life of Alfred, his remorseless brother, returning through the caverns that led from the castle to the Abbey, entered once more the chambers of guilt, and murder. With gloomy discontent he cast his eyes in fear around; all was still as the grave. No object met his sight to appal his thoughts; the bleeding corse of a murdered brother met not his view; nor was a trace of blood visible:—but conscience, presented to his mind the dreadful scene afresh. In a state of disorder and short repentant frenzy, he threw himself on the floor, where he remained till his grim attendant once more entered the bloody chamber, and roused him from his short-lived trance of contrition; starting up and seizing the arm of Hugo he demanded—

“Where hast thou placed the body?”

“Sunk it to the bottom of the ocean!” replied Hugo.

“Slave! dolt!” exclaimed Harrold with passion—“the sea will wash to the shore again the mangled corse. Wretch! thou hast undone thyself and me.”

“My lord” said Hugo “near the cliffs there is a whirlpool; thither, I conveyed the corpse, clogged and weighed down with stones, that soon dragged the insensible Alfred down; and he instantly sunk beneath the bottomless abyss of waters, never to rise again.”

“’Tis well—I will reward thee,” replied the gloomy fratricide, assured of his security.

But whither could he now turn his guilty steps?—To enter the presence of his father, or the baroness, was impossible: he feared his features would too legibly display his fatal secret in their murderous characters. He dared not present himself within the castle: but he retained his dread attendant there as a spy upon its passing occurrences.

It was on the second evening of Bertha's return, that forlorn and desolate she was sitting near the window of her apartment, when her thoughts was broken by the sudden entrance of the baron; who gently taking her hand said—

“The lady Bertha will doubtless be surprised when I declare my confession of a fervent passion that has too long been kept secret from its object. Know then, angelic creature! that I love you to distraction: I do by Heaven!—You would remind me of Elvina,—that she is my wife: she is no longer so. The pope has granted me a divorce, from one who has disgraced a station which you alone can fill.”

Astonishment, and horror now seized Bertha: after a pause of silence, she said, fixing her pale, anguished countenance and expressive eyes full on Egbert —“You know my heart was Alfred's; you have destroyed for ever the happiness of two beings: and to complete your cruelty, now dare to acknowledge an almost incestuous passion for the betrothed wife of your ruined son, doubly criminal to your alliance with a noble spotless lady, and outrageous to every binding tie, divine or human; but the degrading insult of this moment demands from me as firm assurance as the heart can give, that Bertha Brandon never can be any thing to the baron of Wilden.”

She was hastily rushing from the chamber, when the baron caught her hand; and sternly enquired, “Whither would you go Bertha?”

“To the possessions of my father,” she proudly replied: “they can secure me from a moment like the present.”

“You are mistaken lady,” interrupted the baron, “you have no possessions; your father usurped the title,—a domain he never had a claim to, nor his daughter the heiress of”—

Bertha, struggling with the torrent of her feelings, calmly asked:—

“Then who is the heir of Brandon, my lord?”

“The daughter of Emily, its former inheritress,” replied the baron, “your avowed and mortal foe, the present baroness of Neville.”

Bertha felt as if a bolt of thunder had struck her to the earth. That name, so terrible, so often mysteriously mentioned, and the possessor of which she had been taught to shun, that for a moment she was unable to speak, but the tear of anguish started unbidden to her eye: she raised her clasped hands to her bosom as the baron was quitting the apartment, when the baroness suddenly entered.

Egbert for a moment lost his command of feature: whilst a gleam of fury shot from his eyes, and was cast on Elvina, he left the room.

The eyes of the baroness were moistened: at length she said—

“My Bertha, the storm so long threatened, has at length overtaken me; Heaven is my witness, I know not in thought or action how I have offended my lord, but he seeks my ruin and dishonour. In your gentle bosom I seek a balm for the misery that awaits me. Oh! whither can I look for hope of future

peace but in you. Should but my secret emissaries find the retreat of my son, and bring him to my arms, that instant should behold you his."

"Oh never, will that hour arrive that sees me the wife of Alfred," sighed forth Bertha, with a voice of despair.

"Do you no longer love my son? Do you regard lord Alfred?" said the baroness in a hurried tone of surprise and disappointment.—"Oh say, are you not acquainted with the cause of his absence? or is his wretched mother to experience greater sufferings in her fears for him?"

"He is——" Bertha feebly began, and would have added, "lost to us both for ever!" but as the fatal words were escaping her lips, and she had from excess of faintness, thrown herself into a high-backed chair, a hollow voice, in low whisperings, breathed in her appalled ears—"Remember your oaths, and tremble to betray it."

Wildly she started from the seat, and cast her eyes around the dark sides of the gloomy chamber: but twilight had veiled every object from her view, but those near her, and she saw nothing to convince her of the certainty of her auricular organs. She withheld from motives of feeling the shriek of agony that nature would have sent to her relief, and she grieved inwardly.

At that moment four fierce-looking men entered the apartment. The foremost who seemed their leader, addressing the baroness, said, with an impertinent tone,—"'Tis my lord's commands that, you instantly retire from these apartments; we wait to conduct you."

The baroness seemed shocked; but after a momentary struggle, recovered her outward composure, and replied—

"I follow you.—Droop not my love," she softly whispered to Bertha; "this is but a continuation of the injuries I have too long endured," then kissing her cheek, left the room, followed by the ruffians.

Bertha sunk fainting on the couch in an agony of grief: the sleep of innocence soon weighed heavy on her senses, and forgetfulness lulled her harassed spirits: but sharp-panged misery is too watchful to permit a long cessation of pain, and a slight noise that broke upon the stillness of the night, awoke her. As she opened her eyes, the feeble rays of a lamp, held over her, discovered to her horror-struck sight the rusty blood-stained point of a dagger, aimed at her own bosom, ready to give the fatal blow.

The light shone full upon the murderous countenance of Harrold, for it was himself, and portrayed the purposes of his deadly visit. With a deep toned voice he pronounced—

"You have betrayed my secret, and purjured yourself: your life is justly forfeited. I come to claim my awarded rights, therefore prepare to die; your fate is inevitable and hope were impossible."

The sudden horror of such a moment, and the sight of the gloomy form of her destroyer, had for a moment robbed her sense and respiration: but the near danger of such a scene almost as instantly recalled her faculties, and starting from his murderous grasp, she fell prostrate on her knees, as she ejaculated—

"Spare, oh relentless man! Spare me. I never betrayed your secret, or broke my solemn engagement: Heaven is my witness!"

At that moment of horror, a hollow groan rung echoing through the chamber, which sunk to the heart of the appalled Harrold: who casting his eyes around on the repetition of the groan, beheld a pale and bloody form, whose well-remembered features bore the shrunk shadowy resemblance of the murdered Alfred. A cold horror benumbed his senses: the spectre became stationary, and beckoned in angry gestures, for his departure, as it pointed to the turret closet door, which stood open, and by which Harrold had entered. The muscles of the latter swelled with horror and convulsive agony: his eyes glared, and he retreated in haste towards the closet. The form slowly pursued him: and as it reached the portal, it lifted up its hollow sunken countenance, and fixing on Bertha a pitiful look, disappeared in an instant from the chamber. The frenzied Bertha became stunned with terror: and uttering an agonizing shriek, sunk senseless upon the couch.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE castle of Etherwold was now become not only an armed fortress, but a prison; the defeat of the Lancastrians had filled its holds with captives.

Queen Margaret had escaped the pursuit of her foes; and in the night, ventured from her secure recess in the Abbey, and once more reared her warlike standard in opposition to the powers of York: and being quickly joined by an increase of friends, soon gave promise to revenge the late defeat she had endured at Etherwold, which was again threatened with an attack.

The mandate from the court of Rome at length arrived with the documents of the supreme Pontiff; but Egbert, was doomed to a disappointment of his wishes, and could not obtain an ecclesiastical repeal of his marriage with the baroness, till the cause of his discontent was duly investigated: nor admit of a divorce till, on full trial, it was evinced that Elvina had proved herself unworthy of the sanction which the church was resolved to afford her, if innocent of any crime that could provoke the baron's proceedings.

A decision so honourable to Elvina had been obtained through the interposing representations of the Abbot of St. Austin's monastery, and was, by the Bull of the Pope, invested with unlimited power to pronounce sentence according to the justice due to either party.

St. Austin's monastery was not more than a league from the castle of Etherwold : and its superior was a man of such eminent rank and unsullied virtue, that to hope to bribe him to the interest of the baron, was impossible.

The morning of trial arrived. The hall was already filled with the knights and cavaliers ; and the Abbot St. Henry, with a train of venerable fathers from St. Austin's Monastery, had assembled at the castle. Egbert, proudly secure of success and triumph, entered the hall.

With an imperious, undaunted step, he took his seat on the chair of state ; whilst the pages of the monk St. Henry were dispatched to the apartments of the baroness, to summon her presence in the hall.

Every eye was cast to the gallery from whence the illustrious Elvina was to descend ; who, attended by her confessor, the Father Benedine, Ellen, and Ama, soon after entered the hall.

The baroness was conducted to her seat by the Abbot St. Henry to the court. At length, recovering from a moment emotion that had at first deprived her of her firmness, she arose from her chair, and addressing the baron, she thus said—

“ My lord, and husband, in obedience to your pleasure, I have submitted myself thus lowly to your will ; and with a full conviction upon my mind that you seek my disgrace and shame, though God is my witness you have never had a just cause to suspect my honour, my truth, or my fidelity.”

“ Of that the court shall judge,” replied the baron, sternly. “ Was it the duties of a wife, in secret to plot against the peace of her husband, and treacherously to assist in the forbidden union of her son, expressly against the will of his father ?”

“ In that,” replied the baroness, “ I acted from the dictates of maternal affection, and the law of nature.”

“ But how will the lady Etherwold defend her conduct ?” interrupted the baron, “ when informed that her meeting some months back with the stranger in the forest, at midnight, was discovered !” Fury flashed from the eyes of Egbert as he added, “ that stranger was the pretended Sir Godfrey Brandon, the secreted object of her criminal love, and my dishonour ; and for which I here, in the open court, impeach thee, baroness of Etherwold, and sue for an award due to the injuries a wronged husband has sustained.”

The baroness became pale ; she sunk on her seat, overcome with the cruelty of a blow so dreadful and unexpected. She made no effort to repeal the charge ; and this was the dark scheme he had formed for the success of his daring enterprise.

The father Abbot, rising from his seat, pronounced—“ If this be true, you are justified, my lord ; and I am no longer empowered to withhold the article of divorcement. Say you, baroness of Etherwold, are you guilty of what he doth accuse you ?”

The baroness raised her head ; a few tears, expressive of her deep-insulted feelings, came to her relief ; but these she soon dashed away, and with audible firmness replied, as she addressed herself to Egbert—

“ My lord, you have triumphed,—Heaven knows how unjustly—in the ruin of an innocent and guiltless wife. You have with most untrue and slanderous

breath, aspersed my name with the supposition of a crime that I will not deign to repeal. But it is enough, and this last remorseless insult has taught me to respect myself. I will no longer be compelled to remain in this disgraceful court!"

She was quitting the hall, when the Father St. Henry requested her to return. —"Stay, my daughter," he mildly exclaimed; "if you have been wronged, 'tis your duty to clear your conduct from the aspersions that are thrown upon it; and be assured you shall not need support to justify you."

"I thank my reverend father," the baroness replied; "but the justice of my cause I leave to heaven, since he on earth who alone can judge me, knows I am guiltless of the crime he has raised against me."

"Did you not meet Sir Godfrey Brandon in the forest?" questioned St. Henry.

"Once, and only once," replied the baroness, "The female attendant who accompanied me, was witness of our interview; and were she still living, could testify the purity of our intentions."

"Explain its purport, lady," replied the baron sternly; "if that accords truly with your report, I am satisfied, and will rather seek your forgiveness than your divorce."

The baroness sighed deeply, and after a pause said—

"In that I am forbidden by a solemn promise never to explain the trust reposed in me, which not even the disgraceful suspicions I now wrongfully suffer for, can justify my betraying a confidence so sacredly committed to my keeping. I am therefore content to submit to your will, and that your lordship may no longer be restrained by the presence of Elvina, she means to withdraw herself to the sisterhood of St. Austin's; and for that end, again entreats the holy Father to pronounce an award."

The tears were, with an effort of uncommon fortitude, suppressed from flowing down the cheeks of the unhappy baroness, who, supported by conscious rectitude, had finished her soliquy with a unusual dignity, that powerfully spoke her guiltless of the charge reported by the baron against her. She bowed to the venerable Father St. Henry, and with a majesty of deportment, quitted the hall, and unmolested, retired through the upper corridor to her own apartments.

As soon as the commotion of her departure subsided, Father St. Henry exclaimed—

"The lady Elvina is unjust to herself in this adherence to a promise that might be explained, in part, to the re-establishment of her fame and honour."

"She has criminated herself," sternly interrupted the baron, "and acknowledged the truth of my accusation. I am myself satisfied of her guilt, and now demand the just sentence of the pope, and the reversion of her fortunes and those of my son's, in trust for the lord Alfred."

The Abbot formally replied, as he delivered one from among many papers he held in his hand to the page of the baron—

"This, my lord baron, contains the articles of your separation, but not of your divorce; on slender grounds I cannot, without the leave of the pope, neither are you permitted to claim the fortunes of the baroness, which remain entirely



at her own disposal, and descend not to her son till she has departed from this world.”—St. Henry, addressing himself to Father Benedine—“Bear to our daughter, holy Friar, the greetings of the lady Abbess of St. Austin’s, in whose sacred mansion she will be joyfully received, till her own residence is again rendered safe for her return.”

This speech, filled the soul of the Baron with rage and disappointment.

“By what authority,” exclaimed the Baron, “do you presume to dictate in the castle of Etherwold?”

“By that you have forfeited,” replied the Father; “the baroness of Etherwold is now the ward of holy Mother Church, and she will protect the persecuted that fly to her for succour.”

The Abbot then, with dignity, disdained any further intercourse; quitted the hall: whilst the Baron, foiled in his schemes, and enraged at their failure, did not dare oppose a power so arbitrary, and from which there was now no appeal.

The day succeeding the trial, the baroness left the castle, not being able to gain an interview with Bertha, who was closely watched and guarded by order of the Baron, who as guardian had presumed to usurp a power which it was dangerous for Bertha to dispute.

Some days passed in a listless calm, and Bertha was left to the unbroken possession of herself and thoughts; she ventured to open the door of the anti-

chamber, proceeded to cross to the gallery, and passing the head of the grand staircase, when she beheld the baron in a state of inebriation, ascending towards the corridor. At that moment her dress caught his sight, he loudly called on her name as he staggered more quickly up the stairs, but alarmed, she darted down the western gallery ; till she arrived at the door that opened upon some of the chambers of state, into which she ran, unconscious where she was, till, entering a magnificently furnished apartment, she beheld the lady Isabella seated, surrounded by her women.

“Save me—Oh save me!” she wildly exclaimed.

“Who is it” ejaculated Isabella, “that presumes to break thus rudely on the hours of my retirement?”

“One that sues to you for pity and protection,” replied Bertha faintly.

Isabella, proudly rising from her seat, harshly pronounced,—“What pity canst thou hope from one whom thou hast robbed of the lord of her affections.”

“Such only as common humanity should teach you to afford, one who seeks a shelter from unmerited oppression.”

Isabella paused ; the bent of her thoughts seemed, in a moment to undergo a complete change ; the inflexible nature of her proud heart yielded to softer feelings, for casting a look of soothing kindness on Bertha, she said—

“Forgive, lady Bertha, the seeming barbarity of my conduct. I know you are watched by the order of the Baron, whose intentions I have become acquainted with, and ’tis only immediate flight can save you. If you will take my offered friendship, I will provide for your escape to a place of security, Julia shall conduct you to the beach ; at the base of the north cliff, there you will find a boat and guides ready to receive and convey you, far from the perils of Etherwold.”

Bertha overcome with sudden joy, took her leave of Isabella, and Julia opening a door that led through a small vaulted passage, to a secret avenue to the north terrace, quickly brought them to the sea side.

Not daring, to hope she was secure, she flew down the pass that led to the beach, and took a grateful leave of her female companion as soon as she had conducted her to the boat, and the latter returned the way she came, whilst Bertha entered one of the cavities of the rocks, to wait till the tide came up for her guides to put to sea.

The moon, at intervals piercing through the clouds, cast its beams upon the white cliffs ; and Bertha, by their faint reflections, was enabled to distinguish her guides, whose features, as they conducted her down the beach, inspired her with a slight degree of fear and doubt.

Bertha with symptoms of terror, allowed the men to place her in their shallow bark, and jumping into it, plied their oars with such celerity, that Bertha, in a few moments, beheld herself beyond the reach of either friend or enemy. The boat, as it scudded swiftly forward, kept within the distance of half a league of the shore.

The moon, at times, broke through the clouds, and its beams, playing on the frothy billows, produced an appearance sublimely picturesque and beautiful ; whilst the vivid lightnings cut the waters, and added an awful variety to this midnight scene.

They had passed a considerable time on the ocean, when, as a small bay opened upon her view, Bertha discovered the fanes and turrets of a large pile of buildings. Desirous of being informed to whom it belonged, she made the enquiry of her guides, and received for answer, that it was the monastery of St. Austin's Sisterhood. She demanded to be instantly landed, for this was the very haven of her wishes; here she should find her beloved friend: but to her repeated demands for landing her, she received no proof of obedience; and the bay and Convent alike receded from her view, without the smallest effort to approach either.

Alarmed with fears of she scarce knew what, she again repeated her former request, but received a positive denial from Bertrand, who, in a surly tone, answered that he had his lady's orders to conduct her to a place of safety.

"Whither is it you are instructed to convey me?" fearfully questioned Bertha.

"To a seat of my lady Isabella's, where you will be nobly provided for," replied Bertrand.

This answer had, in its delivery, a tone of insolence and equivocation, and increasing alarm, she again asked—

"How far distant are we from the castle of Etherwold?"

"About three leagues," replied Bertrand; "and yonder promontory that juts into the sea, is our land-mark; thither we steer our course, and you will again touch safe ground, if the tempest that I see coming on, do not make worms meat of us."

"By St. George, 'twill be a dismal one!" replied the other; "and this specimen is no slight sample of what is to come."

Some large drops of rain falling on the neck of Bertha, verified the words of the guides; and a loud peal of thunder rung, in awful reverberations, among the cliffs and rocks; whilst the lightnings blazing across the murky atmosphere, presented a fearful view of the angry deep, which dashed the little pinnacle in a moment to a whirling gulf of waters;—and even the stout and fearless guides threw aside their oars, and gave themselves up as lost. Bertha calmly reclined herself on the seat, and resignedly awaited, the approach of inevitable death.

The boat filled with water, and was on the point of sinking. The wind and waves, however, still drove it towards the shore. Bertha, benumbed, and shivering with the drenched garments, lay totally senseless.—For some length of time the thunders continued with increase of vehemence, till suddenly they ceased, as did the rain. The tremendous swell of the billows began to abate, and the boat was washed upon the sands.

Bertha was raised from her dreadful couch; and the men, taking her in their arms, waded through the waters; and she once more opening her wearied eyes, found herself on land again;—She was unable to stand, or even move; and meekly submitting to her fierce conductors, they led her forward.

A new terror now took possession of her thoughts, for she had for some time felt doubt and suspicion of the purposes of her guides; and with a voice that expressed her alarmed feelings, she feebly demanded, "Whither will you lead me?" But still she remained unanswered, till suddenly stopping, she again exclaimed—

“Whither do you lead me?” “I will go no further!”

Bertrand, uttering some dreadful imprecations, sternly replied—

“Lady, this is no place for explanations. Hasten forward, ere the tempest again beset us.”

“Mean you to murder or betray me?” tremblingly enquired Bertha, clinging to the body of a small tree, to support herself.

“Resistance will but provoke your danger!” replied Bertrand, as he unclasped her arm from the tree; “you are now a prisoner.”

“A prisoner!” repeated the now despairing Bertha. “Oh God! am I for ever doomed to be the victim of deceit and treachery? Oh Isabella! false remorseless, cruel woman!”

She spoke no more; for this last blow had struck her to the soul. She became passive and unresisting to the will of her stern companions, who led her quickly onward.

They had wandered for the space of an hour through the dismal darkness of the woods, when she perceived, by the fainter lightnings that flashed, in short intermissions, through the angry clouds, a few ruined and mouldering towers belonging to a building that was as instantly closed from all further examination, and lost in total succeeding darkness.

The guide now entering a wild shrubbery near the walls of the building, discovered a small deep entry, completely concealed from all inspection by the underwood that grew near the portal, which, in its approach, was guarded by several steps, that descended into the earth, and were not discoverable till the layers and bushes were turned forcibly aside. After waiting for a few moments at the small portal, it was at length unfastened, and Bertha was forcibly lifted down the steps, and carried into a cold and dreary passage, dripping with damps and slippery with mildew and green mould.

“Here, mistress,” roughly added Bertrand, to a tall, lank, fierce looking woman,—“here have we brought you your promised guest, who, I warrant, needs refreshment; so conduct us to a good fire, that we may dry our wet garments, and give us something to keep the cold from benumbing our inside.”

Bertha cast a fearful glance upon the form and countenance of the woman. Her face seemed once to have been beautiful, but was now deeply lined and wrinkled; her arms were nearly uncovered, and she wore a robe of black descending from the shoulders, fixed to her waist in hardly any form whatever; her skin was shrunk and cadaverously pale; whilst her long tresses of matted black hair hung in loose dishevelled disorder over her neck and shoulders, and was partly covered on the crown of her head by a thick serge of rusty coloured hue, as was every part of her habiliments, which in various parts shewed them of long continued wear. Disgusted, she withdrew her eyes from an object whose countenance seemed unacquainted with softness, and whose mind was insensible to mercy and compassion.

Every hope of moving her keepers to pity was then in vain; and submissively she allowed them to lead her through the passage to the ruins of what once had been a spacious apartment, the roof of which had fallen, and laid extended over three parts of the floor. The windows, broken and gone, had no other fences

against the storm than some remnants of mouldering shutters, which was here and there nailed in irregular directions across the heavy gothic frame-works. The ceiling was in many places exposed to the elements ; and the only place of safety in this desolate ruin against its fall, was the angle near the fire-place, in which were still remaining a few faint unextinguished embers.

With a dreadful oath, Bertrand demanded more fire ; Anna, the name of the fearful hostess, sullenly proceeded to replenish the hearth, which in a short space of time, again blazed cheerfully with the crackling fuel.

A table was soon spread with the scanty fare it afforded ; but Bertha, who had sunk upon a broken bench, was unable to partake of any kind of refreshment, and remained wrapped in the anguish of her own sad thoughts.

“Hast thou prepared for the lady Bertha the apartment for her use?” demanded Bertrand of Anna.

“Aye, truly,” replied Anna, “’tis ready to receive a princess.—If lady, your delicate palate cannot relish our homely meal, I wait to conduct you to your future prison—chamber, I mean, correcting herself ; but in a manner, as plainly evinced she was aware of her mistake.”

“Peace, beldam !” furiously interrupted Bertrand,—“Peace, I say, and remember !”

The last word, had an instant effect on Anna, who in silence, took a lamp, and retreating to the door, beckoned her prisoner, who, with much difficulty, arose and followed, well convinced that either resistance or entreaty would be equally useless.

As Bertha followed the steps of her gloomy conductress down the murky shades of the gallery, she observed several ruined doors ; and arriving at one less decayed than those she had passed, it slowly opened to the touch of Anna, and admitted her to the interior of an old chamber, of spacious dimensions, and lofty height.

“This is your apartment,” said Anna—“here is your bed, which doubtless you will find very comfortable ; whilst the hootings of the owls, and the hoarse croakings of the ravens, will prove a most consoling lullaby, and charm you to sleep.”

“Leave me,” mildly interrupted Bertha ; “I am much fatigued, and wish to gain some respite from the pains and anguish I endure.”

An angry, fierce glance shot from the eyes of Anna, as she thus exclaimed with an insulting triumph in her manner—

“You will soon grow used to my society ; and the time will come when you will kneel at my feet, and beg me rather to stay than go—when these imperious tones will sink to abject supplications, and you will curse the hour that made you use them.”

She furiously set down the lamp, and hurried through the door, which she pulled with such violence, that the fabric trembled. The harsh gratings of the key turned in the wards of the lock, and the bolts, as they were shot into their holds, sounded in echoes along the gallery ; and the heavy tread of her keeper was heard for some moments, as she receded from the door of Bertha’s forlorn prison, who as soon as all was again quiet, hurried off her drenched garments ;

and having clothed herself in a coarse plain wrapper, that Anna, in sullen silence had thrown beside her, she cast herself on the tottering couch, and merciful forgetfulness for a few hours closed her sorrows in a balmy slumber.

CHAPTER XV.

HER sleep, though heavy, was refreshing, and she awoke not till late on the following day. She was for a moment uncertain where she was; but the painful conviction soon came to her heart that she was the prisoner of a jealous rival, there was no hope ever to escape—perhaps not even a chance of mercy to soften the melancholy horrors of confinement.

Dreadful forebodings now agitated her mind. Fearfully clasping her hands upon her bosom, she mentally exclaimed—

“Wretched, lost Bertha, child of early sorrow, resign thee to thy fate! The crisis of thy suffering approaches, for thou art the sure victim of an unrelenting rival; prepare thee, for the end of thy woes will soon receive that fiat.”

She cast her suffused eyes, blinded with tears, around the desolate chamber, which she found enveloped in gloom. A few slanting beams of day, however, were admitted through the crevices of the boards, from the extremest point of the small gothic arch of the frame-work, sufficient to give a gloomy horror to the aspect of all around.

The place itself was spacious in the extreme, which added to its forlorn and terrific appearance. There was no furniture, except the remains of one broken table, and a high back leather bottomed chair, on which the dejected Bertha passively sunk, hopeless, despairing, and completely miserable. At the further end of the chamber was a large bow window, in a deep vaulted recess, whose approach was defended by an ascent of four steps, which rendered it lower than the others, and easier of access. Bertha, had more than once attempted to climb to its frame, that through the unblinded pains of the upper part, she might if possible, gain a view from without, and discover if she was imprisoned near any human habitation. The effort, however, was fruitless; for the panes, that were unboarded, it was impossible for her to reach, and she was, with a deep heaved sigh, compelled to give up the unavailing trial.

In descending, as her hand clung for support to the image of a saint, placed in a hollow niche of the cumbrous frame-work of the casement, it suddenly touched some object, that as instantly sent forth soft faint sounds of music.

As soon as the echoes had ceased, and her amazement subsided, again climbed to its height, and from the back of the niche, brought forth an old and dusty mutilated lute, of curious antique workmanship. Removing it entirely from its

suspended situation, she descended, and though much broken and injured, it still upon trial, was capable of producing harmony. Well as the dim light of the chamber would permit, she examined it more closely; and wiping the dust from its disfigured frame, she found something had obstructed the chords, which, on close observing, appeared to be two or three papers, that seemed as if they had been forced in among the fretwork of the handle and the strings.

It was near the approach of evening, and the light too imperfect and gloomy to admit the possibility of perusing the interior of these papers, which Bertha perceived were filled with writing. Her curiosity was excited; and for the first time she even felt impatient for the entrance of Anna, that she might, by the more friendly assistance of the lamp, be enabled to decipher the contents. To divert the time till the hour of her keeper's visit, she again took the lute; struck them with a melancholy wildness, suited to the sadness of her soul; when the harsh gratings of her prison door disturbed the peaceful silence; and Anna entering, with angry gesture, approached the table on which Bertha had laid the lute, and casting her eyes upon it, her pallid countenance received a death-like hue, as she vehemently questioned—

“How came you by this instrument?—Speak!”

“I found it in a niche within the recess of yonder window,” replied Bertha, “I pray of you, good Anna, allow me the use of this harmless object; it will afford me a melancholy amusement, and cheer the heavy hours of a wearisome confinement.”

“Will it so?” interrupted the fury, snatching the lute from the table, and with pitiless unconcern tearing off the strings, and dashing it to the ground with violence; “thou seest, however, ’tis offensive, and thus I punish it for your insolence. She, who last played upon its hateful chords, had more prudence than openly to use it in my presence; or had I sooner discovered that the baroness Emily of Neville had concealed it in her prison, it had never been thus found by her—”

Anna here made a quick and sudden stop; whilst Bertha, starting at the sound of a name thus mysteriously mentioned, tremulously enquired—

“Are you the agent of the heiress of Neville, as well as the countess of Clandale?”

“How dare you presume to question me?” replied the woman, in hurried accents; “you will repent this insolent resistance to my will,” she added, retreating towards the door.—“The haughty Bertha Brandon shall yet swell the triumph of that ruin I have laboured to achieve. Tremble, for thou knowest not thy enemy.”

With a glance of dreadful expression, she retreated through the door, while, as it closed, Bertha made haste to conceal the papers; for alarmed at the threats of Anna, she did not dare peruse them, but sat in trembling expectation of she knew not what, and felt a weight upon her heart like a foreboding presentiment of impending evil.

Several hours elapsed and all was still: she felt no inclination to sleep; when she heard the bolts of the door slowly unfastened, and a tall figure carrying

a lamp entered, who as she advanced near, Bertha knew to be the countess Isabella.

Isabella fixing a frowning glance upon her victim said;—"You are at length in my power! Dost thou not tremble at my sight?"

Bertha, raising her eyes to the gloomy countenance of Isabella, fearlessly answered—

"No, I do not tremble!—Why should I? You have persecuted a being that never injured you. You have cruelly broke your word and betrayed me after you had plighted your faith for my security."

Isabella, with astonishment, beheld the unshaken firmness of her intended victim. Hatred and revenge, now flashed from her eyes as she roughly seized her arm, said—

"Bertha, thy fate is sealed, and with thyself it depends to soften or to fix it. One only chance is left, either reveal the place of Alfred's present asylum, and swear never to see him, but to resign all hope and claim to his heart and hand, and bury thyself in some remote habitation, never to be heard of more, this swear, or meet the vengeance of a deadly foe."

Bertha shuddered with horror at being compelled to take a forced vow; she remembered also the papers of her father, had so solemnly enjoined her never to suffer herself to be betrayed into engagements of so dangerous a nature, and she now firmly resolved that no power should compel her a second time to pledge her faith and mind even to procure life itself: she therefore replied—"I never will take an oath, which truth and justice would condemn."

"Then behold thy death," pronounced Isabella as she stamped the floor with her foot: when the door opened and Anna entered, bearing in her hand a goblet which she presented to Isabella, who drawing a dagger, held the poisoned draught to Bertha, and fiercely pronounced—

"Drink the contents instantly!"

Bertha, shrinking from the dreadful instruments of murder, feebly ejaculated—

"Is there no other remedy but this can appease thy malice? Oh ruthless woman!"

"None but this! your death alone secures me a hope of triumph," replied Isabella. Then turning to Anna, she pronounced, "Leave the chamber!"

The latter, bowing submissively, was quitting, when Bertha rushed past Isabella, and seizing the robe of Anna, sunk prostrate at her feet, exclaiming—

"Stay, do not leave me, I conjure you! But if one spark of pity or remorse finds a place in your bosom, save me from the dreadful death that I see awaits me."

"Did I not prophesy aright," replied the fury "when I said the haughty Bertha would stoop to supplicate even the pity of the rejected Anna?"

"She does, she does indeed supplicate thy pity," continued the despairing Bertha, "she bends before thee in humble prostration. Oh think, ere it be to late, on the future horrors that will avenge this moment of guilt, should you be an accompish in the pitiless deed!"

"Thy efforts will not avail; I know not the touch of nature, nor is pity a guest within the bosom of Anna; for know thou pleadest at the feet of thy mortal enemy."



Pub by A PARK, 47 Leonard Street, London.

*She threw open the lid of a large chest and pointing
to the hollow I beheld*



With a vehement struggle, Anna freed herself from the grasp of Bertha, who as she lost her feeble hold of the merciless woman, fell with violence to the ground, as the latter darted from the chamber.

Isabella stooping down, rudely seized the arm of Bertha, which as she shook, ejaculated in a tone of fury—

“Is this the fortitude of the heroic, unshrinking Bertha—this the courage with which she meets a fate, that but a moment since she disdained? Behold! make speedily thy election, ere choice is denied thee—the poison or the dagger!”

Bertha had raised herself on her knees, and with a look of firmness, pronounced “Yes Isabella, the soul of Bertha you cannot conquer, although her life and liberty are at your disposal. I obey the hard decrees of my wayward fate; and even in this present tremendous form will meet the awful king of terrors with the confiding trust of my eternal Father’s mercy and for those unatoned errors I have committed. May your contrition for this deed of guilt and murder be sincere, and your repentance find that mercy and forgiveness from your Almighty judge, which your earthly victim, now, freely accords you! Give me the fatal draught!”

Bertha took the cup from the trembling Isabella; who stood with a look of horror, at the resigned piety displayed by her victim; guilt weakened her arm

she dared not finish her bloody purpose, but seizing the cup from Bertha, and throwing it on the floor exclaimed—

“I will not be thy executioner!” and rushed from the chamber—

Bertha, amazed at the unexpected reprieve, could scarce believe it real, till she heard the noise of the bolts forced into their holds. She inwardly uttered a prayer of thanksgiving for her escape from death. With tottering steps she examined the walls of her prison, hoping to find some yet undiscovered outlet, by which she might free herself, but her search was fruitless. She tried the door but alas! it was too strongly secured. Worn with fatigue at her fruitless search, she stopped before an object that had often engaged her attention. It was a large chest of antique structure, placed on one end against the wall. The lid was fast secured: and as she tried to force it, a faint rumbling noise within, startled her with surprise, she retired from the object.

Throwing her wearied frame upon the couch, a heavy slumber sealed her eyes.

In the visions of her sleep, busy fancy presented terrific forms to her disordered senses. She found herself again trying to force open the lid of the chest, when a deep and hollow groan from within, sounded on her startled ear, and the lid bursting open, a pale and ghastly form stood before her. Its garments were a female shroud; the form, pointed to the chest, and instantly vanished.

She shrieked aloud, and the dungeon re-echoed with her cries, as still in sleep, she lay for a time in a death-like slumber, when fancy presented the pale benign aspect and form of her deceased father, in the habit he wore when living who slowly approaching the couch, blessed her: and beckoning her towards the chest, she arose, and approached the latter, as the spectre pointing to it, bade her unclosethe the lid, which, in attempting to perform, it suddenly flew open of itself, and presented to her sight a skeleton. Shrinking from the object, she was about to leave when the spectre bade her look again, when, to her astonishment the horrific spectacle had vanished; and on a nearer view, she perceived there was no bottom to the chest. The form of her parent, stooping passed through the cavity: and beckoning her to follow, she did so, and found herself on the landing of a steep flight of steps, which as she began to descend, her foot slipped, and fell to the bottom, and, in the effort of rescuing herself, she awoke.

Her eyes she found, were deluged in tears. The fearful visions of the night for a length of time engaged her attention undividedly. The faint streaks of daylight showed through the scattered enclosures of the casements. Her eyes were oftentimes cast on the now awe-inspiring chest.

She now resolved to make an effort for freedom, or at least, if possible, to discover where she was imprisoned.

She dragged the antique table and chair beneath the window: and cautiously ascending, found one of the pieces that crossed the frame were rotten, and soon yielded to her exertions. She put her head through the open space; she started for the object that presented itself to her wondering sight, was the ruin of St. Ann's towers, backed by the lofty forest trees of Brandon's domain.

“Oh powers supreme!” exclaimed Bertha, “into whose hands hast thou resigned me—who is Isabella?” Conviction rushed upon her senses.—She is, she must be my mysterious enemy, the dreaded heiress of Neville.

For some little time she continued to inhale the freshness of the morning air, when her thoughts again rested on the last night's extraordinary visions, she approached the mysterious chest, and was surprised to find a strong current of air blow from behind it. Convinced there must be some outlet, she resolved to attempt its removal, which, after two or three attempts, she succeeded in moving it a short distance from the wall, who could express her joy at beholding a large opening, wide enough to admit her whole person through.

A thousand wild conjectures filled her agitated mind: she therefore determined to wait till darkness enveloped the face of nature, ere she ventured on her enterprise.

At length, her lamp told her it must be near the hour of midnight, when throwing a thick black veil over her head, passed beneath the cavity, and found herself in a long open passage, and shading her light from the effects of the wind, she passed swiftly down the eastern gallery. Gaining at length the end of this dreary corridor, she found herself at the turning of a narrow flight of spiral stairs, she began to descend, and had gained the third landing, when a small door, attracted her attention, and she would have entered it had not a stream of light showed to her horror-struck sight the hateful form of Anna, who was pacing, with her back towards Bertha the length of the chamber.

Not an instant longer had she remained, could have saved her from the sight of Anna, who was on the point of turning, as Bertha darted down the stairs, and with light trembling steps reached the bottom. Pausing to recover breath she listened to discover if she was pursued, but all remained quiet; she resolved to proceed forward.

Descending an immense quantity of irregular steps, that seemed to have been cut in the bosom of the clay and earth, which convinced Bertha she was beneath the foundation of the Abbey. She at length entered a close low arched passage, that assured her she was now in some of those branching vaults that led to the cells and subterraneous labyrinths of the fabric: and proceeding forward, entered a small square stone chamber, which she found had no outlet than that by which she had entered. Here then ended her hopes, and in despair, she was leaving the dungeon when her foot struck against a hard substance, and holding the lamp to observe the cause, found it was a small iron ring, let into the stone, which after great exertion, she succeeded in raising a small trap, that had concealed another department of the vaults.

Bertha hastened to descend, and arriving at the bottom, found herself in the subterraneous caverns of the Abbey. She approached a small recess closed by a door that had no fastenings: but what words can express her terror when, by the rays of a tripot lamp within the cell, she beheld the figure of Isabella deeply engaged in examining some object which she held in her hand.

Isabella had been disturbed by the opening of the door; and raising her eyes she fixed them immoveable on Bertha. It was evident, by her actions and looks that she mistook the real person of Bertha, whose face was hid by her veil, for no sooner did she see her victim than the lamp, as well as what she held, fell to the ground. Her whole frame shook with terror and affright; and with wild and terrific looks, retreated from the vault by a back entry, exclaiming—

“It is the shade of Emily!—Oh awful, when wilt thou cease to persecute me?” leaving the amazed Bertha to wonder and rejoice at the escape she had so unexpected affected.

Not a moment was to be lost. Isabella had deceived herself, and circumstances had favoured the delusion. It was impossible to go further, without following her footsteps: she was therefore obliged to return the way she came, which she was about to do, when she beheld on the ground a packet of papers. A shriek of joy escaped her as she read—

“The secret records of Sir Godfrey Brandon, addressed to his only daughter Bertha.”

“Great God of justice, thou dost not slumber!” cried Bertha, and kissing the papers, put them hastily into her bosom, and was retreating towards the vaults, when, in a small recess she perceived a trunk, with the lid open. Bertha discovered a case of jewels, also several relative to title-deeds of great bulk that seemed lately to have been placed there. A sudden noise alarmed her, and hastily closing the lid and taking the key, which she was assured none had so great a right to, darted through the dreary caverns, and reached the trap. Hastily closing the stone, she turned the ring upon a knotty hold, which effectually secured it from being opened from below, waiting a moment to recover respiration, she listened and heard the echoes of voices.

She now hurried up the stairs; and crossing the corridors, arrived, unmolested at the aperture, and once more found herself in her dreary prison.

CHAPTER XIII.

HAVING drawn her chair close to the table, and retrimmed her lamp, Bertha took the beloved records of her father's labours from her bosom, thus began:—

* * * * *

“When my child shall have perused these papers, let not her thoughts be embittered by the recollection that her father is no longer an inhabitant of this world; let her rather rejoice that he is now at peace for ever.

“Attend, my child, to my unhappy narrative, and know thyself truly; for oh Bertha! thou art not what thou seemest, nor is thy sire the lord of Brandon domain, which, in right of thy angel mother, is alone the inheritance of her daughter.—”

“Gracious God!” exclaimed Bertha, “what may this mean?”

“The birth and title of your father, were as illustrious as any of the proudest

nobles England had to boast; but now, alas! stripped of his name, his birth-right, and his honour, he is become the unresisting victim of an unnatural brother. The undisputed barony of Neville once claimed me for its lord, although it now invests the person of an usurper.

“ My father was haughty and inflexible. He had never loved me like a parent, but on his younger son Hubert lavished his entire regards;—whilst I, the heir of his house, was committed, to the guidance of his confessor, a man of bigoted principles, who instilled into my mind the severe and superstitious doctrines of his own faith, with all its fasts, vigils, and mortifications: my mother, the first baroness of Neville, was dead ere I knew the maternal regard; and the influence of his second wife succeeded in banishing from his memory the affection he bore to his first. To swell the fortunes of my brother, she had bribed my tutor, to her interests; she instructed him to instil into my mind a voluntary love for religious occupations, hoping the choice of my future life would fix itself on the monastic seclusions of a cloister, and secure to her son the inheritance of my birth-right. At the age of eight I was consigned to the care of Vincent, and entirely deprived of the notice or sight of my father. Vincent removed me to one of the baron’s most retired castles. The designs of the baroness succeeded, and I became, by instructions of a bigot, devoted to all the mistaken tenets of such an education. I had reached my twentieth year; and during the last twelve—neither the baron nor my brother, who was two years younger than myself, had ever visited me.

“ It was on the eve of my birth-day that a courier arrived at the castle with dispatches for the father, which I frequently observed, caused the colour of his cheeks, to come and go. At length he informed me the lady Gertrude, my step-mother, had been some time deceased; that my father was shortly expected accompanied by the lady Anna, heiress of the house of Kelvin, whom, in future I must consider as my elected bride.

“ Vincent had no sooner hurried this unwelcome intelligence over to him, than, with all the subtle artifice and sophistry of his character, bade me reflect how serenely my future days would glide away, and what real advantages must attend me in a future state, if, by devoting myself to the service of my creator, I were secured from the dangers of prosperous greatness; uncontaminated by the vices which a free communication with the world would unavoidably occasion.

Attentively I meditated on the father’s words: I almost resigned myself to his wishes, with a perfect conviction that he was directing my judgment aright; I even gave him a promise that if I could escape from the union intended, I would yield implicit compliance to his advice.

“ At length my father and brother arrived. The former received me with a warmth that I was unacquainted with till then. My heart vibrated to the touch of nature and unexpected kindness. My brother, the lord Hubert, received me with reserve and coldness; our meeting was restrained, and damped the pleasures of my father’s affectionate salute. With a confiding tenderness of manner, he conjured me to resign my wishes of a monastic life, and meet his own for my union with the lady Anna Kelvin, with consenting approbation.

“ I had never beheld my destined bride, but waited now with impatience and strong curiosity to behold the being that was to govern the choice of my future destiny.

“ At length, with a train of noble visitors, she arrived at the castle ; but no sooner had I beheld her, than my heart refused to acknowledge her its homage. There was something repugnant in her mien and deportment, that though her beauty might have excused, my election would not.

“ My father soon demanded in private my determination and opinion, when as freely I told him it was not in my power to obey him.

“ He frowned in anger on me, and bade me, as I valued his blessing or his curse, prepare to receive as my wife the heiress of Kelvin, or quit his sight for ever.

“ Hard task ! impossible to perform !—For among the train of illustrious beauties that remained within the castle, was one who had rivetted my attention, and in a short time gained my most impassioned love.

“ Emily came, accompanied by the lady Elvina of Etherwold, then single, and escorted by the father of the former, Rudolph of Brandon.—Some days passed in the celebration of revelry. I found myself a being so altered, so unlike what I had been, that I ceased not to wonder at the change, and forgot the pernicious maxims of Vincent. Ashamed of the fettered inactive life I had hitherto led, I hastened to shake off many of the gloomy prejudices the father had instilled.

“ In the company of Emily, and her amiable friend, the lady Elvina, I passed some of the most blissful moments of my life.

“ One evening, as I entered the apartments assigned for Emily and her friend, I discovered the latter alone, and weeping.—It was this evening I resolved no longer to defer the confession of my passion, and I hesitated not to make Elvina a confidant of my unalterable attachment to Emily.

“ Elvina, as she listened to my secret, turned pale, and I observed her tremble. Alarmed, I begged her to make known the cause of her apparent agitation, and after some inward emotions she said they were occasioned by the unhappy destiny of her friend, who, to swell the fortunes of her only brother, was condemned, by the harsh severity of her father, to pass the rest of her days the sad victim of monastic vows.

“ This was a stroke so unexpected, that, all my youthful hopes of happiness seemed for ever blasted. My despair, and entire devotion to the lovely Emily, engaged the mediating commiseration of Elvina in my behalf. Love lent me strength and wit to use in the pleadings of love’s passion. Emily gave me at length the assurance that she would be mine, and mine only ; and could means be found to escape the destiny of her father’s decrees, she would ratify her promise at the altar of Hymen. Thus encouraged, I confessed to Sir Rudolph of Brandon my affection for his daughter, but Sir Rudolph was determinedly averse and reminded me that my hand was publicly engaged to the lady Anna, and that honour now forbade my retreat. I still urged all that love could dictate, but he sternly refused my prayer, on the following morning, I was informed Emily had left the castle, in the night, from her relentless father ! nor did any

tidings, for a length of time, arrive to ease my racking fears. At length, Elvina received a packet from her lost Emily. Its contents were those of despair.—She had been forced by her father into a monastery, and compelled to take the vow that for ever separated her from her adoring Godfrey. Elvina gave me the fatal epistle, but I read no farther, and for weeks lay an object of pity to all that beheld me. It was one night that sense and feeling again began to chase away the delirium of my brain, when father Vincent entered my chamber.

“It was needless to repeat again the false arguments and meek pretended humility with which Vincent succeeded in gaining his deceived victim to his purposes. At the dead of midnight he led me from the castle; to the eastern borders of England, where, on its shore, stood the proud spires of St. Stephen’s Abbey.

“In this religious house I fondly imagined I had reached the goal of all my sorrows. The time glided away with a kind of torpid, inanimate serenity.—Yes, Bertha, I took the first vows of a monastic life, and became, in part, a monk of the Carthusian Friars.

“It was on one memorable morning, that I was early called to officiate at a neighbouring convent of black nuns, where a Novice of the order was this day to take the last vows of a vestal. The intended victim seemed to inspire universal pity, for it was reported she had been compelled to make this self-sacrifice. A murmur of sorrow rung echoing through the church, as the Abbot led the trembling vestal towards the altar, and began the sacred rite of initiation. The sister drew aside her veil as I held out my hand to receive it—a duty assigned me to perform; when, great God! what was my amazement to find, my loved, my angelic Emily. She saw and knew me as the distracted transport of the moment made me loosen my cowl, which discovered the features of her Godfrey.

“The last fatal vow had been deferred till this hour; I seized the favourable opportunity to declare that Emily’s vows were prohibited. Emily had fainted in the arms of a lay-sister, whose veil falling off, exposed the features of Elvina. In the confusion of the moment, I hastily whispered her to grant me a private interview that evening in the cloisters of the Abbey. She gave me a hurried assent; and, at the hour succeeding vespers, I attended her appointment.

“It would be needless to enter into minute details of what alone can be interesting to my sad heart to remember. It is sufficient to add, that I at length prevailed, and your sainted mother resigned herself to love and me. Aided by the assistance of a monk of St. Stephen’s, whom I had bribed to secrecy, the inaspicious ceremony was performed, the angelic Emily became the bride of your father, and I experienced a happiness never expected.

“’Twas on the night succeeding our nuptials, as I was returning through the garden of the convent, by a secret postern, of which I kept the key, my passage was intercepted, and a sister, as I then thought, of the holy community, approached me, and bade me follow her.

“She led me to a retired grove in the gardens, and, in accents of anger, demanded if I knew her. The voice was familiar to my ear; and as the moon

shone upon her countenance, I discovered her to be the lady Anna Kelvin. When, seizing my arm, she said, with a determined resolution of manner—

‘ You have slighted me—you have neglected the charms of Anna to marry Emily ! Tremble ; the vengeance of an insulted woman will for ever pursue you. Ruin awaits you, and the thunders of the church, for the outrage you have committed on its sacred laws, will overwhelm you with destruction. For crimes like these the flames await you, and the voice of Anna is the sure fate of Godfrey.

‘ I listened to this harangue as to a language that had profaned the angelic worth of my adored Emily ; and leaving the misguided Anna, hastened to my love. We on the ensuing midnight, quitted our convents, and I received Emily from the gates of her seclusion in safety, and undiscovered. Precipitately crossing the kingdom in a contrary direction, we journeyed night and day till we arrived at the wilds of the Scottish shore, where I had an ancient lordship, the inheritance of my mother’s brother, so left to me my him, that none could deprive me of it.—Malcolm tower was a romantic old ruin, built many centuries ago, upon the summit of a long chain of lofty mountains near the sea. Thither we hastened from the dangers we had escaped.

“ If the personal charms of my adored Emily had first fascinated my senses, the surpassing beauties of her mind rivetted the chains of happy love.

“ A few months after our arrival, our stock of happiness was increased, and Emily became the mother of a lovely boy :—but providence had otherwise provided for him. Our first-born lived to be regretted, and then winged his aerial form to the dwellings of his maker.

“ In the following year Emily again presented me with another infant, lovely as herself ; and you, my Bertha, were ordained to be the happy assuager of our deep regrets for your brother’s loss. The correspondence of our only friend Elvina, informed me of my father’s late decease, and I resolved to restore my Emily and her infant to the splendid birthright they were born to possess. My rank and influence, as a baron of the realm, I knew would soon procure me interest sufficient to stop the persecutions of the monks of our convents, since neither Emily nor myself had taken the last irrevocable oath that must have secluded us for ever from each other.

“ But to proceed.—Resolved to restore myself to my inheritance, as baron of Neville, I dispatched a messenger to my brother, desiring him to prepare for my reception at the castle of my ancestors, where I meant first to reside till the arrival of the pope’s absolution had given us security from persecution. With sincere regret we quitted Malcolm tower, and set forward on our expedition to England.

“ As we came within sight of Neville, and upon our nearer approach, I pointed to my brother, who stood upon the highest battlements of the castle, to greet us with welcome to our home ; she cast her eyes slightly upon Hubert, trembled, and sinking into my arms, prophetically exclaimed—

‘ Would to Heaven we had never seen these towers ! Oh my Godfrey ! I have an ill foreboding mind ; and could your Emily guide your wishes, they should in safety convey us back again to the beloved ruins of Malcolm castle.’

“ Alas ! I knew not then the dreadful meaning of this exclamation, had I



but followed this only wish of my too yielding Emily, the appalling horrors of our disastrous fate had been averted. My castle proudly withstood its lord, and opened its treacherous portals only to betray, and make him their prisoner.

“ My brother, the lord Hubert, received us with courtesy and respect. The train of my vassals, awaited in the great hall to bid their lord and lady welcome. The domestics who accompanied us from Malcolm, were only four; but in the numerous throng I was surprised to find not one of the old established retainers of my father’s house.—All present wore new faces, and all to me were strangers. I enquired of Hubert for some whom, in my youth, I had imbibed a value for; he informed me that most of the oldest of my domestics were deceased, and others on my father’s demise, quitted their situation. We partook of the banquet prepared, and at a late hour retired to repose. Unsuspicious of the treason plotted against us, and fatally confident of my security, I slept in peace, nor awoke till the murderous swords were pointed against my breast. A strong glare of light aroused me from my heavy slumbers, I startled from my couch, as the flame of light beamed on several dark visaged countenances, whose drawn weapons declared their dreadful purposes.

“ Betrayed in my own habitation, I snatched my sword from beneath my pillow, and was rushing on my destroyers, when Emily, awakened by the sudden clash of weapons, threw herself into my arm, exclaiming—

‘Oh God ! my prophetic fears are verified ! Godfrey my husband, we will die together !’ and fainted on my bosom. The murderer would have torn her from my strong grasp, but I defended her, and with one hand kept them at bay. My Emily received a desperate wound, aimed at her now frantic husband. A deluge of precious blood issued from her side.

“ Raging with madness, I kissed the quivering lips of my Emily, and laying her on the couch, struck to the earth the monster who had destroyed her.— At first the villains aimed only to deprive me of my liberty ; but enraged to see one man fell to the earth so many of his opponents, they all rushed upon me, and, with repeated wounds, at length overcame me. Fainting from loss of blood I fell to the ground ; the horrid scene was closed upon me, and I knew no more !

“ How long I remained in this state I know not ; but on my recovery I found myself a prisoner in a gloomy chamber of the dungeon tower.

“ Some months had rolled away, when the stillness of my dungeon was one night disturbed by the entrance of the detested Hubert. He approached me as I lay chained to the floor, he drew forth a paper, the damned instrument of my own ruin, and with horror I beheld the characters to be my own. Their fatal contents were the total resignation I had signed of my birthright, and given to the villain Vincent ; and in this interview, I discovered that Vincent had been the secret agent of my brother, as well as his mother ; whose artful pretended sanctity of manners had deceived my father.

“ The fatal instrument of my own ruin stood in characters never to be erased, and I now found that this accursed paper had secured my brother the heirship of my possessions, and that he was, and long had been, the acknowledged lord of Neville. From the hour that I had first entered the monastery of St. Stephen he had spread the report that I had voluntarily taken the monastic vows. My father lived not long after my disappearance, and at his death Hubert’s claims to my possessions were admitted beyond a doubt. I was then the deceived and wretched dupe of a brother’s ambition ; for presenting his dagger to my defenceless breast, he bade me chuse my destiny, and either resign for ever the possession of Emily, and the heirship of Neville, return to my convent, and finish those vows, which, with triumph, he confessed that he, by secret agency, had been the instrument of ; or meet in prison the end of my existence, and his dastard apprehensions.

“ His heart was filled with an incestuous passion for the wife of his brother. The monster triumphed, my wife, my shrieking, horror-struck Emily, was dragged to the arms of her husband’s brother. The double faced villain that had early wrought my ruin, had that very morning profaned the ordination of his God, and over the inanimate form of the insensible Emily performed the sacred ceremony with avowed triumph. The accursed Hubert acknowledged the hell-born deed, and bade me return Emily thanks for the life she had preserved.

“ The raging fury of my soul gave me almost supernatural power. I tore my galling chains from their fastenings, and with a furious aim, dashed them at the monster.—My oppressor fell beneath the violence of my blow, and sued for mercy

I gave him my curses, and was rushing from my prison, when his minions seized, and again enchained me.

Despair and madness assailed me, and a torpid horror kept me for many months in a gloomy uncertainty between life and death.

CHAPTER XIV.

SOME time elapsed after my first recovery to the use of reason, when my jailer, one night entering my prison, bade me follow. Grief and despair had subdued my soul. I was indifferent to my fate ; I followed my conductors from my prison, and being led through many vaulted passages, I once more found myself in the open air. They bade me enter a closed vehicle, that stood beneath the walls of the castle ; and my jailer became my companion within, and four others on horseback, armed, rode beside our caravan. We were driven forward with a speed that succeeded in arousing me to mental action, and I awoke from my lethargy of despair and madness to the recollection of what I once had been. I now remembered that I once had a wife whom I adored, a child whose birth had given increased felicity to her once happy father ; I awoke to an interest in their fate, and supplicated to know their end.—With much entreaty I learned that I was going to the place where they were confined.

“ On the second night we entered the boundaries of a large forest. I saw no more, nor knew I whither they conveyed me ; for they had covered my eyes with a shade, I was led between my guides up several stairs, when they unblinded me, and I entered a dreary chamber, where, sat a lady in mourning habiliments, her face was concealed by her veil. She rose on my approach, when I discovered not the features of my outraged Emily, but those of the lady Anna Kelvin.

“ An hectic glow of triumphant malice irradiated her eyes as she threw open the lid of a large iron chest, and pointing to its hollow, I beheld—Oh God ! Oh God of justice, wherefore slept thy avenging thunders ?—not the once blooming Emily, the sweet image that even in madness cheered my frantic heart ; but the poor, pale, dead form of her who had once been my heaven of happiness ! Emily had ceased from her miseries, and fate and malice had done their worst.

“ Curses, deep and soul-wrung, were all the sad, poor retributions left me ; but what could they avail ; Could they restore the dead ?—I kissed the cold lips of my angelic love, as she lay cramped in her narrow prison ; for even the common ritual of the dead was denied her by the cruel Anna.

“ As with the stupified gaze of despair, I was still beholding the poor insen-

sate remains, when the inhuman Anna bade me view the sacrifice of slighted love, the just atonement of her injuries.

‘Remember,’ added she, ‘the oath I took to avenge them; Emily is my victim; not herself only, but all that she has borne, shall feel my vengeance!’

‘Away, fiend of hell!’ I frantically cried. ‘May the keenest punishments and torments be inflicted on thee; and while thy life continues, be conscience thy tormentor, and thy soul the victim of its severest pangs!’

“Imprinting a last kiss on the cold lips of the poor injured saint, they hurried me from the fatal chamber, and again blinding my eyes, conducted me to the vehicle. Resistance was useless; and, I was once more conveyed back to my former prison.

“The jailer, till lately attended me in silence, at length, he informed me that Emily, on the accursed night that we arrived from Scotland, had been conveyed to other apartments as soon as I was overcome. Her wound was but slight,—and when she recovered from its effects, she was ordered to prepare to receive the monster Hubert for her husband, or behold the death of him, as well as her child, whom she must consider as no longer such, since her marriage with myself was unlawful, by the vows I had plighted to the sacred profession of monastic devotion. To save her child and husband, the hapless Emily consented to the sacrifice of herself.

The usurper triumphed in an angel’s ruin, but guilt converted his incestuous love to hatred and remorse; and resigning the victim of his lust to the power of his greatest agent, the ruthless Anna, he left her to the mercy of that dreaded foe, though not till she had borne him a daughter—Isabella so named.

“It was about a week succeeding my re-imprisonment, that the monster, followed by his miscreants, entered my dreary dungeon. The villain again offered me a choice of destiny in the chance of life and death that awaited my election. I drew back from his near approach, as thus I ejaculated—

“By what right hast thou assumed a privilege to enter the presence of a brother thou has ruined?—Away! begone! and quit my sight for ever! My soul abhors thy blasting view! and my curses, the curses of a brother, pursue thee with anguish everlasting.

“The usurper trembled; pale horror sat on his countenance. Precipitately he fled my prison, and I never after beheld his detested person.

“But the deeds he himself wanted courage to perform, was readily supplied with hirelings to execute; and on the following night, his agents entered my prison with you in their arms, whom I had not for two years seen.—

‘Give me, Oh give me my child!’ I cried with joy, at beholding thee; but they prevented my approach with their swords. The ruffian that withheld thee from my arms, had raised his unsheathed sword over thy little form, whilst his companion, informed me that liberty and life awaited me, on condition that I took a solemn binding oath to forego for ever my claims and inheritance of Neville, become a stranger to my native country, and swear never, in any degree whatsoever, to make known whom I was, or contradict the report, which was universally believed, that I had become a votary to monastic seclusion. If I consented, guides were already engaged to carry me on board a vessel that was to convey

us from the shores of England to those of France: if I refused, the upraised sword against my child, was to perform its dreadful purpose, and my own life then seal the fears of the tyrant in the murder of his neice and brother. At first I started from the horrid sacrifice, but I had no redress, no alternative allowed me. My soul had lost all zest for worldly splendour; your outstretched arms, as they were expanded towards me, bade me save your harmless innocence from the cruel tyrant's sword. I obeyed the sweet impulse. An oath, horrible in its nature, and binding as the ties to heaven could make it, was administered; the fatal vow escaped my lips, and I solemnly swore never to make known to mortal breathing, but particular to thee, the sacrifice I had made, or the dark events that had caused it. This accursed deed performed, the ruffians no longer withheld you from my arms, and we were conducted at midnight from our dungeon. As our guides conducted us from prison, Philip, the jailer, from whom of late I had experienced several acts of kindness, put into my hand, unseen by his companions, a slip of paper, and bade me peruse it when alone; ere the break of day, our guides had conveyed us on board the vessel that still lay at anchor near the shore.

“The ruffians, who had conducted us to the ship, gave us in charge to its crew; and soon left us. I hastened to the cabin, that by its lighted tapers I might decipher the paper of Philip. It ran thus:—

* * * * *

‘Trust not your brother’s word; he has deceived you; the vessel you suppose designed to transport you to France, is in reality a pirate, intended to convey you to a Barbary corsair, to whom yourself and child are sold. Be secret, as you value this caution; and should you escape, make known to him, who now risks his life to save you, the place of your residence.

: ‘PHILIP.’

* * * * *

“My fears were verified, and our tyrant had still in store for me increase of persecution.

“It was not yet daylight. The apprehensions of a parent for his child, nerved my arms, and quickened my invention. I entreated the captain of the ship to allow me to remain on deck till we sailed. The request was granted.

“The vessel was only a small trader, and lay at anchor upon its side, not far from the shore; for the water was very shallow, and the flow of the tide would not yet permit them to draw their cable.

“The moments were precious; not an instant was to be lost; and unloosing my cloak, I wrapped you safely in it, and fastened you securely round my neck. I seized a rope at that side of the vessel which leaned towards the water. The pitchy darkness was favourable; and in silence I let myself down. Gently gaining the other end of the vessel, I swam, with little noise, towards the shore, whilst the riotous revelry of the crew on board, secured our retreat; and in safety reached the shore.

“I hurried through the trackless darkness of night with all the speed my nearly exhausted strength would permit; and as the day began to break, I descried a

distant cottage on the verge of a wood. Thither I hastened, and beneath its sheltering roof rested my weary limbs in safety from my pursuers.

“Some days were spent in this retreat. Oswald, (for he was the master of the cot) was poor; and having lately lost his wife, with gladness consented to become my servant.—We journeyed at midnight from the cottage, and after several days, arrived in safety at my ancient possession in Scotland.

“You had nearly reached your eighth year, when one morning Philip, the rough but honest jailer of my prison, when confined at Neville, entered my apartment. He then declared the greatness of his mission. Hubert had discovered that myself, and child, had escaped. Philip, at the hazard of his life, had hastened on the friendly office, to warn me of our danger.

“Not an instant was to be lost: we hastened from the hospitable retreat of Malcolm tower.

“I had assumed the name and title of Brandon from the first moment of my arrival in Scotland, and the mansion that gave the title to its possessor was now the last sad refuge of its hapless heiress.

“Here, then, in the Abbey of Brandon I securely rested. Here unseen, I had leisure to reflect on the past occurrences of my life, and, in the opening graces of my child, to trace the growing resemblance of my beloved Emily.

“Philip, the jailer, to whose friendly interference we had twice owed our escape from the fear of death, sometimes related in manuscript the actions of the detested Hubert, that he had never, of late, resigned himself to his golden couches of downy softness, but with the expectation of being dragged from his illegal seat of power by the arrival of his wronged brother, to demand retribution and redress.

“In the meantime, you, my Emily, (for that is your real name, Bertha being only a fiction, assumed to deceive all chance of discovery, and which appellation you must in future be known by, when at the bar of justice you will assert your claims to the inheritance of your father), grew up in all the youthful plenitude of your angel mother’s fascinating perfections.

“Oh Emily! will you not think it strange that to preserve you from the mysterious dangers you from me inherited, I, unknown to yourself, had entered St. Agatha’s tower, to warn you secretly of evil which openly I was withheld from. The remote situation of the Abbey I knew was our surest protection; but, anxious for your future safety, I did not oppose your desire of tempting the supposed dangers of St. Agatha’s ruin. The history of the unfortunate nun, which I had found among some ancient records relating to the Abbey, in the old library, I enclosed in the manuscript my own hand had traced, the better to secure your attraction to the envelope, and continue that delusion which my solemn oath forbade the unfolding of. Bound to eternal silence while living, I had no other alternative left me than to alarm your fears, and at least excite curiosity to guard you against their mysterious effects.

“The papers of instruction that guide you to the repository of these direful records will inform you how to proceed in the investigation of your rights to the inheritance of your ancestors. The noble Elvina, when you shall have made known to her the contents of these papers, will aid your pious purposes, and

guard you from the malice of your foes, my fears for your safety will be assuaged, and my child nobly guarded from the ill effects of her orphaned and destitute state.

“ I grow weak—my eyesight fails me—I can write no more at present ; but to-morrow or, perhaps, on the ensuing midnight I shall have gained more strength, and these racking agonies will have ceased. Farewell !

“ The stranger has left me ; again I resume my sad employment :—perhaps, ah ! too certainly for the last time I address you.

“ You are alarmed, Emily, at this sudden journey ; but I go to restore you to yourself. The friendly Philip, informs me the tyrant is no more : his death releases me from my vow—silence and submission are ended—the hour of retribution is at length arrived, and only a girl remains to oppose my legal claims. Helen of Neville is now Isabella of Clandale ; but she inherits her father’s unrelenting nature, and pursues us even with greater rigour than her ruthless sire.

“ To the tribunal of justice I hasten from the Abbey to prove the wrongs I have endured, and accomplish your restoration to your inheritance ; but should death arrest my progress ere I arrive at the destination of my journey, then will these papers, with others of confirming value remaining in the chest prove your undoubted rights.—I cannot say, *Farewell for ever !* though my soul assures me that I have enfolded you for the last time in my paternal embraces. May providence protect my child.

* * * * *

The agonized Bertha was proceeding to the end of these dreadful papers, when a noise in a distant corner of the chamber startled her ; nothing however appeared to warrant alarm, and she again bent her sorrowful eyes on the manuscript.

“ Remember the dignity of your birth, and the illustrious rank and title of your name, which is no longer Bertha of Brandon, but Emily, baroness of Neville. These papers are the only proofs of your lawful claims to the inheritance of your forefathers ; respect them, and fulfil the mandates of their contents ; so shall they be enabled to retrieve from oppression and usurpation your long despoiled rights.”

In pronouncing the last words, her blood suddenly forsook her heart, her joints stiffened in horror ; for her hand was suddenly grasped, and the precious records were wrested from her, when a voice, ejaculated—

“ There sink for ever the last testimony of your claims !—Perish in the flames the lying forgery of an impostor and a madman, and be the rights of Helen secured beyond dispute !”

Emily sprung from her seat as, in anguish and despair, she shrieked aloud—
“ Save them, Oh spare them !”—and rushing towards the hearth, she seized from the before dying embers of the fire, some that had not yet shared in the conflagration. Isabella, however, snatching them from her, again consigned them to destruction, whilst, with an uplifted dagger, she guarded the hearth till the whole were entirely consumed.

Bertha viewed the flames of the precious manuscript, till it became annihilated and not a wreck remained : and those lines, the labour of a suffering parent, as they shone for a moment bright in the crimson glare, expressed in more illumined vivid characters their crying wrongs for vengeance and retribution.

She fell, exhausted and insensible, upon her couch as Isabella closed the door of her dungeon; and remained alike void of feeling for the past, or sensation to the tortures of the present moment.

CHAPTER XV.

HUBERT the usurping Baron of Neville, in his latter hours of life, felt the stings of an upbraiding conscience; he was heard to lament the injuries and sorrows he had inflicted on his brother, whom to redress and restore to his long despoiled inheritance, became the wish of his heart; and strange though it seemed, as the usurper became more penitent, his daughter's rancorous hatred against her uncle increased. She had, from infancy, been taught to consider herself as born to the splendours of illustrious greatness; and to maintain her power, and secure its continuance, no sacrifice was thought too great; and when in confidence her father informed her how unjust her claims were to the inheritance of Neville, she peremptorily refused to relinquish her right, nor would consent to acknowledge any other than herself as heiress to their possession.

The soul of Helen Isabella, was aspiring, inflexible, and daring; and her heart was as imperious as the high fortunes of her fate were superior to her merits. But when informed that her father really meant to restore his fraudulently gained possessions, her rage, though it dared not openly shew itself, was if possible, more dreadful, because concealed; and the efforts of the earl to discover his brother were rendered still more unsuccessful, from her secret counteractions of his designs. Some unguarded expressions of Philip, who was, though faithful to an impious master, a real friend to the oppressed Sir Godfrey, relating to his knowledge of the latter, Isabella was made acquainted with, who, on a pretended suspicion of disaffection, succeeded in obtaining his banishment from the castle of Neville; and hence it was that Philip was deprived of knowing the true designs of the earl of Clandale, which might perhaps have saved Sir Godfrey's life to a longer period, and secured Bertha from the future persecutions of the remorseless Isabella; who with unfilial joy, received the news of her father's illness, and approaching death.

Hubert, in his latest moments, strongly enjoined Isabella to finish the search he had so unsuccessfully begun, and restore to his wronged brother the only means of reparation in his power now to make him, solemnly conjuring her, as she valued his future peace, as well as her own, to enter a house of religious penitents; where, by the pious devotion of herself, the guilt and violent outrage of her own birth might find mercy and forgiveness.



Hubert died, agonized by the thoughts of his inhuman cruelty to his brother.

Lady Isabella became, after her father's death, reserved and gloomy. Her whole thoughts bent on one object, the retaining possession of an inheritance she was resolved never to resign whilst the power was solely vested in herself.

For the lovely Emily she had imbibed an implacable hatred ere she saw her ; but when in Bertha Brandon she found the object of her fears, and the rival of her love ; the long-smothered passion of deadly aversion, overcame every sentiment of pity or remorse ; and when arrived at the castle of Etherwold, she found the mind of Egbert congenial to her own, she reflected that should she marry either Harrold or Alfred, it would then become the interest of their father to extirpate a rival so dangerous to the hopes, and fortunes of his son, by an alliance with herself. Having well weighed these thoughts in her mind, she acquainted the Baron with her real situation, and her election for the partner of her future life, rested on Alfred.

The subtle Egbert, listened with inward amazement to this confession. His behaviour, however, to Isabella, suffered no diminution of respect ; but when he found that Isabella was the usurper of another's rights, of which there was a probability she would one day be deprived, he began to waver whether to receive her as a daughter. The Baron felt for Bertha a lasting passion, even before his knowledge of whom she really was. It is even possible but for that, he

would (after the discovery of her birth) have accorded his approbation of Alfred's choice: but Bertha's fascinating charms, he had reserved for his own possession, regardless of the misery he should entail upon his son, or the injustice of his conduct to an illustrious woman, the Baroness, his equal in birth, and superior in the virtuous perfections of her mind.

The indignity of Elvina's trial had proved a check to his growing ambition; and the disgrace, recoiled on himself, since the purity of the Baroness secured her from the effects of calumny: and the fortunes of Holy Church withheld the fortunes of Elvina, till they became the inheritance of her son. This loss, Egbert knew he should amply supply in his union with the real heiress of Neville. His daring soul, veiled in a deceptive mask, was but too capable of acts of injustice and iniquity: nor was his well concealed artifice, exposed to the view of his destined victims, till ensnared in his treacherous devices, they were beyond the power of aid, or escape; nor was it too late that Isabella regretted her misplaced confidence in the Baron:—and tremblingly alarmed for her secret, she hurried back to the castle, upon the receipt of information which her spies gave her, of his intended union with Bertha, hoping that by her presence, she should awe the Baron till some means were found to frustrate them entirely.

An over-ruling fate, drove the hapless Bertha from the power of one persecutor to the hoped for refuge of the other; and in her own domains she endured the horrors of a dungeon, where she had a right to expect a home.

Isabella no sooner became acquainted that Bertha was the heiress whose prerogative she usurped, entered the Abbey secretly soon after Sir Godfrey's death, when all its inmates were buried in sleep, she discovered, by the black trappings, the chamber of her deceased uncle, and opening the cabinet in the turret chamber found sufficient proofs that the supposed Sir Godfrey was in reality the Baron of Neville. The papers contained matters of the utmost importance to Bertha. One was a particular description of the secret department in the wainscot of the west saloon, and was in reality the approach to the vaults, where was secreted every testimony of Sir Godfrey's birth, and the history of his wrongs and misfortunes.

Isabella perused some few affecting passages, that made her tremble. She was about to destroy all the papers, but a sudden tremor shook her frame, which, with the lone stillness of the place, the lateness of the hour, together with the upbraiding stings of the heat, pictured to her mental and corporeal sight, a pale white form, whose ghastly countenance, cast in angry glances on her, alarmed her from her purposes, and throwing her unfinished work into the cabinet, hurried from the gloomy chambers, leaving the mutilated papers in the condition they were afterwards found by Bertha.

Isabella staid in the castle some days after the disappearance of Bertha, that her too soon withdrawing herself might not give the Baron cause of suspicion, whose rage at the loss of a being he had regarded as his victim, became unbounded and dreadful. At length she took leave of her guardian, with a design, as she expressed of hastening to Neville castle; but she went no further than the Abbey, which she took possession of, as a fit place for the execution of her dark designs.—Death was the allotted portion of her hapless victim, had not some

sudden starts of nature, made her fluctuate in their execution, that held her will its captive; and at one moment she almost repented of the dreadful purpose, considering that by imprisoning her victim for life, she might still be the possessor of Neville, and save her hands the guilt of having shed the blood of innocence.

In an agitated, irresolute state of mind, she resolved to search the vaults for the secret records of Sir Godfrey. For this purpose she entered the recess of their repository, attended by Anna; and having obtained the papers, was about to destroy them, when the sudden appearance of Bertha, whom she mistook for the apparition of the unfortunate Baroness Emily, overcame her with terror, and she rushed precipitately from the cell, convinced she had seen a spectre; but Anna, after narrowly searching around, found the veil of Bertha, that had unknown to her, fallen from her head on the recovery of her father's papers, sufficiently convinced Anna who in reality the supposed spectre was; she succeeded in allaying the fears of Isabella, who trembling lest her victim should have escaped, she with her companion, hurried through the intricacies of the caverns, and gained the door of her captive's prison, which softly opening, she found her safe in her chamber, and still in her power. At the sight, she was rushing in to seize the records, when Bertha was disturbed by the noise. She therefore waited, till all was again quiet, when softly stealing to the chair, the vengeful Isabella committed, as has been seen, the only proofs of her rights, for ever in oblivion, and every trace of her claims were destroyed.

The enraged Isabella, alarmed at the late danger to which her secret had been exposed, determined that this night should finish for ever her bloody purpose.

The evening set in stormy and comfortless, and all without was in unison with the inward horrors of Isabella's mind, as with wild impatience, she told the sullen strokes of the Abbey clock, the hour of eleven.

"Only eleven," she gloomily repeated, "Wherefore should I longer defer the settled purpose of my soul."

"'Tis early yet," replied the friendlike Anna,—“she may not be retired to rest, besides, the fury of the tempest would keep her awake.”

Another silent half-hour was past: at length the notes of midnight sounded over the woods, and awoke Isabella to action. Starting up, she grasped the instrument of death; whilst her agent, seizing the lamp, they together stalked to the scene of midnight murder.

Isabella hurried through the dark passages and vaulted aisles of the Abbey. Her steps became unsteady, and as she walked down the middle aisle of these dreary mansions of the dead, her foot suddenly slipped, and she fell: when as Anna held her lamp still lower, to the lady Isabella to rise, the latter, with shuddering horror read aloud, as her eyes were cast upon a black marble stone—

Sacred to the memory

of

GODFREY, LORD OF BRANDON.

She paused, nor read again; and if the grave had suddenly opened, and raised to her view the silent, injured dead, to wake her into penitence and remorse, it

could not, more powerfully have influenced her:—she trembled, paused, and conscience once more would have triumphed had not Anna been present, who taking the arm of Isabella, and violently shaking it, thus sternly exclaimed.—

Weak, undermined lady, reflect, should you suffer your rival to exist, Alfred is lost to you for ever, and Egbert will restore the idol of his love to the inheritance she is heiress of—

“Enough!” replied Isabella, “she dies, and the grave of her father shall soon become her last resting place.”

Anna now quickly led her from the spot, and by traversing a number of secret passages, known only to herself, entered the south ruins, which led them to the door of the hapless victim’s prison.

“Give me the key,” ejaculated Isabella, “and do you retire, and wait my call in the gallery.”

When alone, Isabella for a moment paused, she at length silently fixed the key in the door, which slowly creaked on its rusty hinges, and made her start. Fearful that her lamp might awake her victim, she shaded it with her robe, as with gliding steps, she entered the dismal chamber. All within was silent and dark, she approached the couch on which Bertha lay reclined in a deep and heavy slumber. She drew forth the fatal weapon; no power opposed the blow. Bertha was herself unable to resist the stroke, unconscious of her danger. At length Isabella raised the fatal instrument. A faint cry broke from the lips of the sleeping Bertha, for in her dreams she seemed to portend her danger; then sinking for a moment to an almost deadly stillness, she lay as a being quite deprived of respiration, till again her vision became horrid, she shrieked aloud, and awoke to behold her vision realized, and view the dagger’s point about to enter her bosom.—“Oh God!” she despairingly ejaculated, “my visionary picture is fulfilled! have mercy, and spare me ere it is too late! Think, oh think, whom it is you would destroy, and save yourself the future horrors of unavailing remorse.”

“It is a vain effort! replied the vengeful Isabella, “behold thy fated end!” raising her arm, to strike her prostrate rival, who only exclaimed, as she cast her eyes first on Isabella, then up to her God, to whom she silently appealed—“Now I am ready! short will be my remaining pangs, but thine everlasting! for remember thy victim is thy *sister*!”

Scarcely had the last word escaped the lips of Bertha, than Isabella, started back, and the dagger dropped from her nerveless hand. Without daring to cast her guilty eyes on the suffering Bertha, she was retreating from the chamber, when the demoniac Anna rushed in and seizing the dagger, said—

“Had’st thou resigned this act to me, it had ere this been executed.”

“Then be it so!” replied Isabella—“Do as thou wilt, so I never behold her more.”

Saying these words, she darted from the dreadful scene, unable herself to perform, or witness its conclusion: and Anna seizing her victim exclaimed—

“My triumph will at length be complete. Vengeance, though long delayed, is at length arrived, and the life of the daughter shall atone for the injuries I have sustained from the father.”

At that instant a deep and hollow groan rung through the chamber; Anna wildly cast her eyes towards the iron chest, as if impelled by an irresistible impulse, when she beheld a form, whose hollow sunken visage was turned in ghastly paleness and frowning anger on herself, it beckoned her to quit the room when not daring to stay longer in the awful presence of a being of another world, she left her bloody work unfinished, and rushed out.

Bertha no sooner heard the closing door shut, than falling on her knees she returned thanks to the Almighty for her unexpected escape, with a grateful fervency that only a virtuous mind can truly feel. She felt the blessings of happy conscious innocence.

CHAPTER XVI.

HER serenity was disturbed by the opening of her prison door, and a harsh voice recalled her to recollection, as the glare of a lamp shone on the dark countenance of Bertrand, the villain who had conveyed her from the castle of Etherwold to her present melancholy prison. With a look of stern ferocity, he bade her follow him.

“Whither?” asked Bertha.

“You will know, ere long,” he roughly replied.

Bertha, was too well assured resistance was fruitless; therefore she followed her guide in silence along the winding corridor, and down a distant flight of stairs.

Arrived at the closed door of a room Bertha heard the faint cries of some person in evident pain, proceeding from the interior. Bertrand, slowly unclosing the door, led her down a few steps; and Bertha, casting her eyes round, beheld herself in a small recess, where at one corner a female form was stretched upon a low couch, whose groans bespoke the extreme pain and anguish she endured.

“Are you then so pitiful as to approach a dying sinner?” exclaimed a voice familiar to the ear of Bertha.

“The man now quitting the cell, and closing the portal, the anguished person called for Bertha to advance towards her; who, as she did so, beheld, by the feeble ray of a suspended lamp, the ghastly distorted countenance and form of Anna, now penitent and dying.

“Approach,” she cried, with an enfeebled tone of voice, “approach, poor, injured being! and now behold thy triumph in the fall of thy once mortal enemy! cut off from the scene of her iniquities in the unrepented fulness of all her heinous

sins. Deeply have I wronged you. Oh may the only atonement I am permitted to make, procure me some slight remission of my crimes! for oh! 'tis certain that I now feel the awful conviction of its touch, and know there is a God of justice and punishment.—I cannot die without thy forgiving pardon; in pity to my anguish, pronounce the blissful mercy of thy peace to my benighted soul.

The astonishment of Bertha at a scene so unexpected, had for a moment suspended her faculties: but her soul, melting to the touch of pity, at the agonies she saw depicted in the countenance of the expiring wretch, made her charitably hasten to afford, into the affrighted soul, her entire absolution and pardon of the wrongs she had sustained.

“May the supreme being, whom, for my guilty self I dare not importune, reward thy goodness!” feebly uttered Anna, “and now, that I may make some atonement, let me provide the means of thy enlargement: this night is fortunate and will befriend thy escape. In yonder chest thou wilt find a suit of male attire, it will secure thy retreat from the Abbey; and ere I sink to my dreaded oblivion in the arms of death, know that in the last and guilty being before you, you behold the poor remains of the once proud heiress of the noble house of Kelvin.”

Here the power of speech was withheld, she recovered just strength to groan for mercy at the throne of divine majesty.

On Anna rushing from the chamber of Bertha, in all the terrific imagery of supernatural apparition, in her extreme haste, she had incautiously placed her foot upon the decayed stairs of the ruined gallery, one of which beneath her weight, escaped its rotten holds, and plunging the miserable Anna down the steep, she was hurled to the stone pavement of the passage below, mangled in the most shocking manner. Her shrieks brought Bertrand to her aid, who bore her to one of the dreary cells, in the most excruciating tortures. She made several efforts to speak, but all attempts were fruitless; till a speedy mortification stopped the writhing agonies she had endured, and the first words she pronounced were an impatient and eager demand for the presence of Bertha. Bertrand, not entirely devoid of pity, received the instructions of Anna, and hastened as has been seen, to perform them. The astonished Bertha, in mute wonder, beheld the unexpected scene, and with compassion, deigned to ease the last struggles of her once most inveterate foe. She even prayed fervently that the misdeeds of the guilty Anna might find from her late penitence, the mercy of an eternal judge.

Having equipped herself in the attire pointed out by Anna, Bertha quitted the awful scene of death; and carefully closing the door, entered the corridor with trembling steps. Proceeding forward, she reached the vestibule, and hurrying up the steps that led to the door, which now was all that stood between her and liberty, and urged by desperation, unbolted the heavy fastening. The door giving way, she darted up the remaining steps, and in a moment beheld herself in the forest, screened from observation by the darkness of the night, and the close tangled boughs of the concealing woods, along whose intricate mazes she flew. At length, however, she became exhausted for want of respiration to proceed further;—she seated herself upon a hillock of the roots of a tree. Not a

sound broke upon the stillness of the night. The death of Anna, and her own escape seemed to her astonished senses rather the work of enchantment than reality.

For a long time she wandered over trackless paths in hopes to free herself from the dark labyrinths of the woods. At length, wearied and exhausted with the unavailing efforts, she became, from the excess of faintness and fatigue, unable to advance; and now resigning every hope of succour, sunk upon a green bank, without the power of sustaining her weary frame.

She had for some time been in a state of torpid forgetfulness, when a loud whistle echoed through the woods, and awoke her from her insensibility. Some persons passed the glade where she lay reclined: Bertha, called feebly for aid. Some rough looking men at length approached, and discovered the sufferer; one of them drawing from his vest a leathern flask, held it to the lips of Bertha, and in harsh tones bade her drink the contents, who did as he desired, and soon found benefit to her sinking spirits; whilst the stranger viewing her with wonder and scrutiny said—

“By the Virgin, ’tis a tender-hearted youngster, and seems but ill acquainted with the rude blasts of fortune’s frowns. Thou hast I suppose, escaped from some old grey-headed cynic, who has denied thee thy lawful heritage when thy spirit demanded it, but cheer thee, boy! I will conduct thee to our noble chief; and as thou art but a green and beardless youth, and ill-suited for our glorious enterprising life, thou shalt be promoted to the honour of being his page; no doubt, but he will treat thee kindly, and in a few months thou wilt become as able and brave a swordsman as any among our valiant gang.”

“Gracious God!” inwardly ejaculated Bertha, “become an associate of robbers! Oh Providence! for what am I reserved?”

Her soul shuddered at the fearful picture of her thoughts, but resistance was useless: and she submitted to be raised from the earth, though the wounds she had received from the thorns and briars rendered her at first nearly unable to stand.

As they proceeded forward, Oliver the foremost robber, thus continued addressing his discourse to the suffering Bertha:—

“Our captain is noble, and will soon, if he finds thee willing, make thy fortune. He is indeed sometimes given to melancholy moods, and shuns our societies; but he never hinders our mirth. Be sure to avoid provoking him, nor attempt to pry into the secrets of his actions. We have found him brave, and generous, and therefore have we trusted him, though a stranger, with the command of our gallant troop:—as yet he is unknown to any of us: and strange as it may appear, we never yet have seen the entire features of his countenance.”

Bertha listened to this account in silence: she reflected that, deeply as she regretted it, yet in a den of robbers, she should be far more safe, than she could have been, had she remained at the Abbey.

The robbers quitted not the edge of the forest, but led their trembling prisoner in silence to the outside of its skirts, till they arrived at the brink of a deep shaded dell, at whose summit they halted; when Oliver, seizing Bertha by the arm led her down a steep and rugged descent, and raising a moss covered

trap, discovered a flight of steps, down which she was carefully conducted, and in a few moments found herself in a spacious cavern: when from the glare of a tripod lamp suspended from the roof, Bertha beheld a large mishapen table, and seats on which sat a number of fierce looking men and women. Oliver, now approaching a tall woman of a beautiful but fierce aspect, exclaimed—"Here Elfrida, I picked up this young trembler in the forest: I have spared his life till our captain resolves whether to keep him, or not; so do thou administer to his needs."

She was conducted to the recess assigned for her repose, where she threw herself on a pallet of straw wishing for the morning, when she trusted she should quit her dreary confinement. A gentle slumber, overpowered her care-worn spirits, and she had slept for some time in undisturbed serenity, when a sudden noise, awoke her, and she found herself supported in the arms of the terrifying Oliver, and that the bosom of her apparel had been torn open. Bertha too plainly perceived the discovery he had made of her sex. He fixed a glance of meaning on her face, and bade her lay aside all useless reserve, and expect in him a friend:—then seizing her arms, he would rudely have kissed her neck, had not Bertha, shrieked for help, and with a majesty of manner and voice, proudly commanded him to conduct her instantly to his captain.

Cursing the disappointment of his hopes, he sullenly bade her follow him; but in half-expressed sentences, he muttered some dark threats.

As she entered upon a ruined vaulted passage, Oliver, opening a door at the end said in a low tone of voice, as he bade her enter—

"Do not hope to escape me; for, in spite of your favoured captain, you shall be mine!"

The room was light; and Oliver, following her into it, pointed to a couch on which reclined a black figure.

"That is our captain! I leave you together;" and retiring, Oliver shut the door.

Bertha started as the chief arose, he wore a black visor over the upper part of his face, he approached the trembling Bertha, and seizing her arm, said in a voice of anger and harshness—

"Hast thou not betrayed me?"

Bertha, in amazement, hesitated to answer a demand so mysterious and inexplicable; when the chief withdrawing his mask, discovered, to her sight the countenance of Harrold. A degree of horror overcame her strength, as loudly he exclaimed—

"Do'st thou now not know me? Has't thou not betrayed my accursed, fatal secret?"

"Great God!" ejaculated Bertha, "I do indeed most fearfully recognize thee! Oh, can I ever forget the murderer of——"

"Forbear!" interrupted Harrold, with a voice of thunder; "dare not on your life, recal the hell-incited deed. I know thou viewest me with detestation and abhorrence, as the being who has destroyed thy happiness, as well as that of him who was dear to thee;—the fatal act is passed beyond recal; and since hell itself has planned our mutual ruin, together we will reap the harvest of our



guilt.—Thou hast betrayed my secret, and perjured thyself, therefore is thy life the just forfeiture of thy broken faith:—but fate, have cast thee securely within my power, wherefore should I longer hesitate to claim thee as mine.”

With horror Bertha heard the stern fiat of her destiny; and sinking on her knees, she raised her hands and eyes to heaven, and audibly pronounced—“To thee, oh Father supreme, I appeal to witness for my truth, that never did I betray the fatal promise I had been compelled to make, nor ever did the knowledge of that deed of blood and horror, escape my lips to any mortal. Oh then suffer not thy erring, but not guilty creature to fall beneath the afflictions of triumphant vice.”

Rising from her knees, with a glow of indignation and courage mantling her cheeks, she added—

“Harrold, I fear thee not, for my trust is in him who will not desert me.”

She turned from the hated destroyer of her peace, with that innate assurance which virtue ever feels at the sight of degraded, fallen human nature; but Harrold was not to be so repulsed. He grasped her hand with violence, as he bade her remember she was in his power, and at his mercy.

“You struggle vainly with your fate,” he added.—“I have too long delayed its completion and my reward; if therefore, life be dear to thee, thou must become the sharer of my misdeeds, which alone offer the means of preservation.”

“Knowest thou not,” replied Bertha, “that between thee and me, God has

placed an impassable gulph that never can be forded ; for thy soul is stained with a crime, that hereafter the spirit of Bertha, when it forsakes its mortal habitation must become thy witness at the judgment seat of eternal justice, to thy confusion and despair. Thou may'st indeed deprive me of life, but my will thou can not conquer.

The determined manner in which she delivered her inmost resolutions, awed the cruel Harrold from his purposes. The struggles of conscious guilt subdued his mind, and he paced the chamber, overcome by the horrors of his former deeds of blood and enormity.

Bertha, perceived the hesitating irresolution that passed in his mind, resolved to pursue her advantages. Sinking on her knees before him, she besought him to spare her an increase of affliction, and suffer her again to pass freely from his power. There was such an almost seraphic look of innocence in her appearance, that Harrold turned aside his eyes, and groaned in the torture of soul, with sensations of horror, remorse, and penitence.

At length, he gently raised her from the ground, as with agitation he said—“Thou art sacred : I will not, dare not harm thee !” then retreating from Bertha with a look that spoke the inward horrors of his soul, he drew his sable mantle over his face, whilst the black plumage of his helmet concealed the terrific wildness that rolled in his large black eyes. Bertha, hoping that he had relented, made another effort to engage his pity, and again entreated to be released from her dreaded prison.

Suddenly uncovering his face, Harrold, with a voice of terror and anger exclaimed, “Desist from a vain entreaty, lest I recal the mercy I so lately gave thee promise of ; be content that I spare thy life, and regard thy person with respect, but beyond these walls expect never to pass !”—opening a small door at the upper end of the chamber, he added, “Here is a chamber, you may repose with security. Within, you will find such habiliments as befit your rank and sex.”—A distant horn at this instant sounding, made him start.—“I am called to the council of my friends ; some danger threatens our troops. Till my return, farewell.”

Harrold closed the door after him, and securely fastened it, and Bertha once more found herself a prisoner.

The discovery of her disguise rendering her present habit no longer of service ; she discovered in a large cabinet a drawer filled with female apparel, one the plainest she could discover, she made choice of ; having bound her vest with a zone of black bugles, and confined her auburn tresses with the same, she threw a sable veil over her head, and looked the living representative of melancholy and sorrow.

As the night advanced, she felt her heart oppressed with fear and anxiety, and she even wished for the return of Harrold. She also trembled at the threats of Oliver, and the too sure means his lawless course of life afforded for the execution of any daring plans he might set on foot for the attaining his detestable purposes ; for among the robbers who did not go on this night's expedition, Bertha had observed through one of the small coop-holes, Oliver was one ; and now, with trembling expectation of she scarce knew what, awaited in momentary dread, to behold him rush into the apartment, to fulfil his angry threats.

CHAPTER XVII.

HARROLD, the heir of the noble house of Wilden, was indeed the captain of a band of robbers. It was on the third night after the horrible act which had made him a fratricide, that walking gloomily through the forest, and deliberating of his lost peace, he was suddenly surrounded by a fierce band of men. Having accorded with their demands, he secretly watched them to their abode, and carefully marked its exact situation. The horrid deed he had committed, appalled his soul: he trembled at the dreadful murder he had perpetrated. To enter again the towers of Etherwold, no consideration could induce him. Secreting himself in the gloomy interior of the eastern tower he awaited the conclusion of his fate.

From the portal of the eastern chamber, he had frequently beheld Bertha. It was on the night that the Baroness held her last interview with Bertha, that he was about to enter her chamber, but the sound of voices made him pause. He did not hear all that passed; but what he had gained, was enough to make him tremble for her guilty secret: and his was the voice that had so much alarmed her. Not satisfied with the oath she had taken, he entered at midnight her apartment, to destroy the only living witness of his bloody deeds; but as he approached the couch where she reposed, his full designs of death, had nearly proved fatal to his intended sacrifice, when the supernatural appearance of his injured brother's violated form, appalled his senses in all the living reality and damning apparition.

Rushing from his destined prey, and from the chamber to the eastern tower, overwhelmed by his crimes, he threw aside the insignia of his high rank, and muffling himself in a long mantle, and covering his face with a visor, rushed, in wild disorder to the den of the robbers, demanded admittance, and only enjoining them to forbear enquires, offered himself to become a member of their lawless band.

It so happened that the captain of the band had, on the preceding night, been killed in a fray with some travellers. Oliver was the next in command, but the unexpected appearance of Harrold, whose gigantic figure and commanding superiority, impressed the robbers with a rude kind of reverence to his person, won the majority of the troop, to elect him their chief. Here guarded by a numerous set of sanguinary beings he knew he should be safe from the consequences of his dark misdeeds, even if they were discovered.

After the departure of Harrold, upon a plundering expedition; Oliver, who had gained some of his comrades to assist him in recovering, as he stated his captive, whom their chief had insolently robbed him of, proceeded to the door

of the hapless Bertha, and seizing his trembling prize in his arm, bore her again to the terrific caverns, surrounded by his associates.

Bertha threw herself on her knees, and besought their pitying mercy and forbearance ; but the brutal Oliver snatching her in his arms, told her he had a priest at hand, who would satisfy her delicate scruples, and bade her resign herself cheerfully to his fidelity and love.

Bertha shrieked aloud, and the cavern re-echoed her cries, as vainly she cast her eyes around to catch a hope from the presence of the females. It was a scene of wildness that might have appalled the stoutest heart.

Bertha ! hapless Bertha now lay, spent with struggles, when the hollow sounds of footsteps, descending the steps of the cavern was heard, and a figure was seen at a distance, whom, as the full glare of the tapers shone upon his haughty crest, they discovered to be their commander, singly returned from his expedition.

Harrold, no sooner fixed his eyes on Bertha, than snatching her from the arms of Oliver, drew his sword to defend his lovely prize, from the daring spirit of his associate. His adversary met his strong nerved strokes of death with firmness, and they fought with the desperate fury of men bent on the destruction of each other. The combat was long and fierce. The robbers stood calmly by viewing the dreadful strife with mute suspense and divided attention. Oliver fought with the rage of a disappointed villain, and though Harrold had the advantage in attitude and command of figure, he was doomed to feel the skill of his opponent's prowess : for the latter, watching the moment when Harrold raised both his hands to fell by one decisive blow his daring foe, with agile and vigorous movement, drew from his vest a long dirk, which (as the speedy ruin was falling on his own head, he nimbly avoided) at the instant he plunged beneath the joint of his antagonist's cuirass, which fatally entering the heart of Harrold, he fell to the earth, gasping in the convulsive struggles of a speedy dissolution, the miserable fratricide of a brother's life ; and now sinking beneath the horrors of death, inflicted by a midnight ruffian, deluged in blood.

Harrold cast his blood shot eyes, glazed in death, on the half-recovering Bertha, who with the pity of an angel, rushed to his aid. He articulated as convulsively he turned his dying sight first on her, and then fearfully to heaven—

“Forgive, and pray for my departing soul ; forgive me Alfred ! Oh God, forgive ; have mercy !—Oh—” and with a soul-harrowing groan, he sighed forth his guilty spirit to an awful eternity.

Bertha faintly pronounced a silent inward forgiveness ; and now that he no longer became an object of terror, she could not refuse this last act of mercy to his sudden terrific end.

An universal pause of amazement, succeeded the last groan of the prostrate chief. Oliver himself was faint and weak with loss of blood. He tore from his robe a binder, with which he staunched the blood ; and seizing Bertha, he would have forced her towards a distant recess ; but struggling once more for freedom, she released herself from his grasp, and seizing the arm of a robber in whose countenance she fancied she perceived a trace of pity, with a tone of majesty and innate dignity, ejaculated—

“Respect the daughter of the Baron of Neville; and if you have mercy, protect her from the violence she is threatened with.”

“The Baron of Neville, thy father! say’st thou lady?” questioned the robber with surprise, “Art thou the daughter of Hubert, or Sir Godfrey?”

No sooner had she replied to his questions, than drawing his sword, he loudly pronounced—

“Then Philip shall defend thee, injured lady with his life!”

At that moment, a shrill whistle reverberated through the cavern, and in a moment after, it was filled with the robbers who had been absent on a prowling expedition. With wild affrighted looks they rushed into the cave.

“We are betrayed!” shouted a number of voices; “our foes pursue us to our last recess, and only arms can save us.”

These words had scarcely been pronounced, when a cry of “No quarter!” echoed from the cavern’s mouth, and a warrior, followed by a number of soldiers rushed upon the robbers, when a dreadful scene of carnage and massacre ensued. The fight was desperate in the extreme. The robbers disdained to yield, well knowing that certain death was the consequence, should they surrender. The scene was horrible to nature, and Bertha feebly staggering from the terrific strife, fell nearly senseless on the ground of a low recess at some little distance.

At length the numerous band that had been the terror of the hapless Bertha, were now reduced to very few, who, no longer opposing their victors, sued for mercy, and submitted to become prisoners.

The dangerous Oliver met his end, fighting to the last.

The calm that succeeded gave the conquerors time to recover their almost spent breath, whilst a warrior approaching Bertha exclaimed, as he gently assisted her to rise—

“Fair stranger, you are free; allow me to conduct you from this abode of infamy.”—As the knight lead her to the light of the larger cave, he started, as thus he added. “I cannot be deceived, do I not behold the lady Bertha!”

Bertha, casting her eyes feebly upon the stranger, beheld the countenance of one of the knight’s she had seen with the Baron Egbert. She thanked him, and entreated him to conduct her to the monastery of St. Austin.

Sir Etheldred assured her of compliance; and informed her, as he conducted her forward, that her fears of the Baron were at an end, since he had been vanquished, and was expected on the morrow, that the castle of Etherwold would surrender to the victorious Margaret, whom he had joined with his troops. Sir Etheldred now conducted his lovely charge along the out-skirts of the wood; and the first dawning of a grey morning displayed to the welcome sight of Bertha, the spires of the convent of St. Austin, situated on the verge of a high promontory that overlooked the ocean. A grateful prayer of inward thanks was offered up to heaven for the long-deserved attainment of her hearts wishes; and as the portress admitted her, she took a grateful leave of her protector.

The superior of the monastery received Bertha with a motherly tenderness, and assured her of protection. The arrival of a long expected stranger soon flew through the community. The baroness had long been in expectation of the

coming of Bertha, and scarcely had the latter mentioned her name, than she found herself clasped in the maternal embraces of the only real friend she possessed, and tears of tenderness and joy choked for a time the power of utterance. At length, the Baroness suppressed her own emotions, as attentively she listened to the sad narrations of Bertha's account of her parent's sufferings.

The treasonous resistance of Egbert, rousing the indignant anger of the valiant queen Margaret, she resolved to take vengeance, and scarcely had the second morning of the siege arose, than the signal of battle was given by the intrepid queen, who stood on an eminence at a short distance from the castle; and soon the battering rams burst the gates of Etherwold asunder. Many of its towers and turrets were half levelled with the ground, and the ramparts were soon strewn with dead.

Among the foremost of the victors was Sir Etheldred, who with a small party began the assault at the only causeway that opened a passage to the sea. Here Egbert had placed himself with a superior force. The action was long and desperate, and often did Egbert repel his foes half down the steeps, and as often was he in turn drove back again to the very brink of the sea precipice. Sir Etheldred provoked to deeds of desperation by the increasing supplies of foes that every instant came to the aid of Egbert from the fortress, resolved, if possible to finish the dreadful strife, and rushing furiously through the hottest fight towards the opposing chief, he loudly called on Egbert to meet him in single combat.

Their clanking arms resounded to the heavens, and the fury of their dreadful strife lasted for a length of time; neither gained the slightest ground. At length Sir Etheldred cleft in twain the crested helmet of Egbert, who retreating, was as furiously pursued, yet again he made a last effort to vanquish his valiant foe, but was overcome, and sunk, weakened from loss of blood upon his knees—a posture he did not long remain in; for gathering all his strength, he rushed furiously on his foe, and the battle again raged on either side with dreadful fury. The besieged at length gave over the contention, and retreated towards the postern of the fortification that overhung the sea: but with such rapidity were they pursued, that fighting backwards as they went, and driven in the heat and fury of the fight to the very brink of the shore, many of them fell over and sunk, as did their leader, to instant and watery grave, who nearly vanquished, and sinking with wounds, was insensible in death;—such was the fate of Egbert.

The garrison no sooner beheld the fate of their commander, than they gave over all further resistance, threw open the gates of Etherwold, and casting down their arms, sued for mercy.

A cessation of hostilities was proclaimed, and having invested the command of the garrison in the hand of one of her warriors, with orders to resign it to the heir of the castle, she quitted the latter to prepare for her departure towards the capital.

It was on the decline of this day's battle, that a stranger, arrived at the confines of the camp, and besought admission to the royal presence. He wore a helmet ornamented and closely drawn over his face. His form and figure were hid beneath a loose dress, and girded by a steel belt entirely round him.

Margaret had beheld the stranger pass the lines of the camp ; and now, when his request was made known to her, directed her own knight to conduct him to her presence. With grateful deportment, the stranger advanced, and kneeling before the queen, presented to her a folded paper, which humbly he besought her to peruse. Rather surprised, the warlike Margaret cast her eyes on the stranger, then on the paper, and read with earnest attention : then fixing a look more intently on the unknown, she earnestly asked—

“ Can’st thou prove the truth of what is here deciphered ? ”

“ Aye, so please my gracious mistress ! ” replied the stranger, “ such vouches have I, as cannot be denied. ”

“ Rise, ” cried Margaret, “ be thy suit granted : and if what thou here aver, prove good thy word, queen Margaret shall be truly found not regardless of her people’s wrongs ; nor shall justice be withheld from the injured, but yourself be witness of the issue. We know the being for whom thou hast petitioned. Within the fourth hour of the succeeding morrow bring thou the parties to our royal presence, and be Sir Etheldred, the guarantee of their’s and your security. ”

The queen, placing the paper in the hand of Sir Etheldred, bade him retire with the unknown to perform the execution of its request.—It specified that there were still in existence indubitable and important testimonies that Bertha of Brandon was the wronged inheritress of the possessions of Neville, and the stranger, at the forfeit of his life, promised to produce such proofs as should establish the truth of his bold assertions, and restore the long injured heiress to her ancient right.

Fortunately for the cause of Bertha, Sir Etheldred was the chief deputed with royal power to execute the mandates of her will.

As soon as the latter had read the paper, he turned to the stranger, and demanded how he was to proceed ; adding, “ I am myself well acquainted with the present abode of the lovely Bertha, and shall rejoice in being the instrument of her exaltation. ”

“ Mother of God ! ” interrupted the stranger, “ am I indeed so fortunate to meet in you, Sir Knight, the only being who could perhaps direct my anxious search for the hapless wanderer. Oh speak ! tell me did she indeed escape alive, the horrid den of the robbers ? ”

Sir Etheldred, amazed at such a question, now turned with increased curiosity, to the mysterious stranger, who he now concluded must either have been a prisoner of the robbers, or else a robber himself, and had found means to escape the cavern by some unknown outlet. He was however, unable to judge truly, for the stranger had closed the visor of his helmet ; and when he had answered his last demand, remained totally silent to the questions which Sir Etheldred in turn would have had answered ;—only saying, with an impressive tone,—

“ I am myself fettered, from circumstances unnecessary to be explained, openly to appear the champion of injured virtue ; but to thee, Sir Etheldred, I resign that enviable title. As thou regardest the honour of unstained knighthood, I charge thee neglect not the power with which our gracious sovereign has invested thee, and at the hour appointed, the sound of the trumpet shall be the signal when I will again appear to make good the truth of what I have deposed.

With these words, delivered in a slow expressive tone and manner, the stranger slightly bowing, quitted the spot, and suddenly gliding among the tents of the soldiery, was instantly lost to sight.

Sir Etheldred had listened with attention and wonder, to the foregoing instructions of the stranger, who had directed him to Brandon Abbey, as being the present residence of Isabella of Clandale.

There was in the soul of Sir Etheldred, a principle of chivalry and love of gallant exploit, and to redress the wrongs of the injured, and destroy wherever he found it, the power of oppression, was one of the chief employments of his life. Having dispatched proper messengers to summon Isabella to appear at the royal tent, he hastened himself to communicate to Bertha the change so likely to take place in her concern, and to conduct her himself to the appointed station of the expected trial.

The cares of the Baroness had recalled Bertha to animation and feeling.—They were both mutually employed on pleasing and painful retrospection, when their seclusion was broken in upon by the entrance of Sir Etheldred, who hailed Bertha Baroness of Neville, and explained his unexpected visit.—A sudden agitation shot through the heart of lady Bertha, as she listened to this wonderful account; that she sunk unresistingly on the bosom of the Baroness, who, having heard Sir Etheldred's relation, now declared her resolution to accompany the Baroness Emily (for such in future she in right must be entitled) to the throne of Margaret, as a sure supporter of the wronged orphan's claims. But Bertha felt no touch of joy in the opening prospects which promised her a reward for all her past sufferings: she declared her determination never again to expose herself to the horrors and dangers from which she had escaped; adding, that as she well knew every document of her claims was lost, she never meant again to enter the busy scene, or dispute with Helen Isabella her just inheritance.

This resolution, however, was soon over-ruled by her two friends. Sir Etheldred declared that the mandate of the queen for her appearance must not be disputed; and the lady Elvina reminded her that in this unlooked for turn of her affairs, she was called upon, by duty and affection, to establish the fame and honour of her parents, as well as redress the dreadful injuries they had sustained. This last argument had its desired effect, and she no longer refused to comply with the wishes of her friend.

Sir Etheldred, promising on the ensuing morning to be at the Abbey, now took his leave; and Bertha, filled with agitating fears, retired to her pallet, but not to sleep. She lay reflecting on the events of her life, and the consequences of the succeeding morrow.

She arose early: and descended to the parlour of the Abbey, where awaited the Baroness and Sir Etheldred, who delicately endeavoured to cheer and encourage the lovely orphan for the ensuing scene.

With a mind inwardly calmed by those aids which virtue lends, the afflicted Bertha once more quitted the Monastery, and accompanied by powerful friends and supporters, pursued her way to the august presence of the monarch.

The morning was uncommonly beautiful; and the sun with refulgent glory, shone bright on the smiling scene. All nature wore a face of joy,—all around

was harmony and peace ; and the thunders of war, that but the day before had shook the forest with its dread rebound, now slept in a calm and dead repose.

Bertha felt the sweet contrast dilate her sorrowful heart with unusual serenity ; and as she proceeded through the beloved woods of her own domain, she experienced a pleasing thrill of joy at the appearance of scenes so endeared to her memory and sight, because she never expected again to behold them.

Here let us leave her on her way to the scene of action, and follow the footsteps of Isabella to the same end.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ISABELLA, on the night she had entered the prison of Bertha, had, in spite of her remorseless nature, felt a degree of horror, that awed her from a deed so dreadful as murder. Enfeebled by guilt, and the monstrous enormity of such an act as the murder of a being who was the daughter of her own mother, she found herself unequal to the horrid deed ; but quitted the chamber in the full assurance that the work herself had left unfinished, would find a surer conclusion from the hand of the furious Anna. She waited for several hours, the return of her blood-thirsty accomplice, at times half wishing the deed were left undone. She did not dare again to return to the horrible scene, although her suspense, in the non-appearance of Anna, was almost madness to endure.

Anna, though late in her penitence, had been sincere ; and as soon as the use of speech permitted, had dispatched Bertrand to the countess, with an account of her dying state, and a desire immediately to behold her : but in order to secure the escape which she meant to aid the hapless captive in affecting, she gave Isabella the most solemn assurances that Bertha was no more, and that every fear on her account ended in the death which her own hand had given. Thus was Bertha's escape never discovered, and Isabella deceived that her fears were for ever at an end. The death of Anna was a circumstance that gave her satisfaction, since she no longer had occasion for this guilty witness of her crimes ; and now considering Brandon Abbey as legally her own, she resolved, for a short time, there to remain till her hopes of Alfred should either be confirmed, or totally destroyed ; and should the latter be the event of all her wishes, she then meant to return to her possessions of Neville, to enjoy those treacherously obtained dignities, which to retain, no effort, however cruel and remorseless, were left untried.

The party, deputed by Sir Etheldred to convey the countess of Clandale to the camp of the queen, found her, as directed, still at the Abbey.

She received the royal mandate with haughty, but suspicious scrutiny, and tremblingly demanded its cause: and when the commissioner gave into her hand the paper of the mysterious stranger, she at first peremptorily refused to yield submission to the order: but the royal signet soon convinced her how impossible was resistance, and she was conducted from the Abbey to the camp. When arrived at the latter place, she deliberated on the surest means of counteracting these unknown proofs of her own and her father's crimes; and though she could not fathom their mysterious contents, she felt a degree of horrid triumph in reflecting that the records of Sir Godfrey were the only witnesses she had to fear, and those she well knew her own hands had totally annihilated: but were it even otherwise, and that in reality there were living testimonies of her guilt, the death of her hated rival was a security that could not be disputed, and would prove a complete silencer of every other claim.—Resting on this deceiving certainty, she entered the royal tent of the queen with no outward signs of fear or guilt; and endeavoured to appear ignorant of the real cause for which she was summoned.

Sir Etheldred, the preceding night, had in a private interview with the baroness, obtained a full knowledge of the story of Bertha, as well as that of her parents.—Returning to the pavilion of the queen, he related, the narration Elvina had given him; and thus confirming the mystery of the stranger's suit, the illustrious Margaret resolved herself to sit in judgment on the events of these dark transactions.

The morning came with all its cheerful attributes. A large open pavilion was pitched in the middle of the plain; and in a regal chair, placed under a canopy of state, sat the august consort of Royal Henry, the judge and decider of the approaching trial. And as she sat upon the seat of judgment, she looked awful in majesty, as she had proved herself great in arms.

Near to her throne stood the Seneschal of Normandy, the Earl of Clifford, with the duke of Suffolk, and others of her noble warriors: whilst, on the other side, stood the ladies of her suite, with her train-bearers, standards, and war trophies. The lines of the pavilion were filled and crowded by the officers, knights, and supporters, that had long fought the battles of their illustrious sovereign.

Helen, haughty and inflexible, was led through the multitude of spectators to the presence of the queen. She bowed humbly to the throne, as the commissioners conducted her to the small raised gallery appointed for her to sit in. Timidly she cast her eyes around, and, in the extraordinary preparations, she trembled at the reality of approaching danger, and now felt her heart fill with horrid doubts that Anna had deceived her with a false account of Bertha's death. But how was the certainty of those doubts augmented, when at a little distance she perceived the well known person of the injured Emily, supported by the baroness of Etherwold and Father St. Henry, attended by several venerable monks, approach the royal pavilion.

Emily was indeed advancing. The wronged orphan of an oppressed and ruined sire, and entering the royal tent with the consciousness of unsullied rectitude and purity, she prostrated herself before the throne of the queen, who, with a gracious smile, encouraged and raised her.—A reception so flattering gave her

additional courage ; and bowing low and gracefully to all the court, she was conducted by Sir Henry to the stand appointed for her by the herald of the queen.

The illustrious Elvina, having paid her homage to the monarch, was graciously received ; and after some time conversing with Margaret, she crossed the circle of the pavilion, and joined Emily, who in a moment seemed to have engaged and won the admiration and pity of every beholder present.

The intrepid queen Margaret, acquainted with the injuries of Emily, had graciously resolved to trace, if possible, the dark deeds of the earl of Clandale to their spring and source.

No sooner had the applause ceased, which the arrival of Emily in the court had occasioned, than Margaret, making a signal to the herald of arms, the latter demanded aloud of Isabella her name and title.

Isabella, now trembling, pale, and almost subdued, had supported herself only by an effort of uncommon pride, from sinking to the earth, as she beheld Emily enter. In a faltering, but haughty tone she answered—

“ Helen Isabella, baroness of Neville, and countess of Clandale.”

“ You are here cited,” exclaimed the herald, “ to answer to the misdeeds of Hubert, your father, the usurper of his brother’s rights, and also to reply truly to such questions as shall be demanded : say, under what presumption did Hubert assume the baronial lordship of Neville and its dependence ?”

“ From the priority of his birth,” replied Isabella, “ since the death of his elder brother rendered his claims of heritage unquestionably his by the law of succession.”

“ But thou art thyself acquainted that Sir Godfrey Neville died not, but for many years lived in retirement, to escape the persecutions of his brother, thy reputed father ?”

“ It has, by false report, been so affirmed,” replied Isabella, gaining courage from some inward recollection ; “ but were there any truth in such an assertion, he must have forfeited all claims to inheritance by the vows which engaged him to a religious life.”

“ How art thou sure, that all his vows were passed ere he quitted the monastery,—Hast thou any such proofs ?”

“ I have not,” answered Isabella, trembling inwardly.—“ But had I such, they would be unnecessary to the establishment of my father’s rights, since they were secured, by the death of Sir Godfrey, many years past, in his passage from Albion to the shores of France ; and in vindication of my sire’s honour, I here pronounce the person that disputes the justice of my inheritance to the possession of Neville, an imposter.”

“ Let the trumpet sound,” exclaimed the herald aloud ; “ if, at its third call, no one appears to confute this last assertion, then shall the words of the countess of Clandale be justified.—Sound !” (The trumpet sounded). “ Again !”—Again the trumpet sounded ; but expectation vainly stretched the eye, in eager hope of the stranger’s re-appearance, but he came not ; and now the herald, refusing to bid it sound a third time, turned to Emily and said—

“ Lady, ere the third blast calls thy champion ; declare who and what thou art ? ”

“ My name is Emily,” she replied, “ heiress of my father, Godfrey Baron of Neville.”

“ Canst thou produce written witnesses, to prove thy claims ? ”

“ Such documents, I did possess, but they were torn from me, and committed to the flames.”

Scarcely had the blast of the trumpet sounded the third call, than a figure rushed towards the throne before the queen, and producing a packet of papers he said—“ These will confirm the truth of my assertions.”

At that moment the Baroness wildly exclaimed, “ My son !—Oh God he lives ! ” throwing her arms around him ; but painful was the excess of joy that filled the soul of Emily, as she fainted on the bosom of the long lost Alfred, for it was he himself, who was by the command of the queen, conveyed to a private tent, and the conclusion of the trial was postponed.

With joy the Baroness and Emily listened to the story of his resurrection as it were from the grave.

The dagger of Harrold was not mortal, and Hugo when left to the disposal of the body, finding some faint breathing of life, resolved to preserve if possible the life of Alfred, and after a few days care, was restored to speech and reason, but Hugo, could not allow him freedom, as his own life would be the forfeiture should Harrold come to the knowledge of his brother’s existence : but touched with compassion, Hugo permitted him to parade at certain hours, through the vaulted caverns of the rocks. Some days from this period passed in listless, torpid sorrow. At length Hugo finding, from the affairs of the castle, that Harrold would never be its owner, (consented after having bound Alfred by solemn oaths, never to discover himself till his brother’s death,) to his re-visiting the forest of St. Moreton, and even the Abbey ; where he confined his visits to the eastern chambers and towers.

It was on the night, the death of Emily was attempted, that Alfred, awed the dreadful purposes of Harrold, who never suspected, that in the re-appearance of his brother, that he beheld the reality, and not the shadow of a guilty conscience ; and, in a moment of terrible retribution, he had flown as the last resource of his crimes, to the den of robbers as the only security from avenging justice.

Hugo was well acquainted with the actions of Harrold ; and on the night that the banditti received their final punishment and fate ; he had witnessed his master’s death, as well as his associates ; and now it was that he resolved to insure his own future safety, by restoring the injured Baron voluntarily to his liberty, he made such terms as Alfred, in the overwhelming joy of recovered freedom, hesitated not to accede to.

Alfred on the fatal night of his entry into the eastern chambers, had discovered some papers that had deeply engaged his attention ; and whatever were their contents, he no sooner regained his liberty, than hastening to the royal tent, he acted as has already been seen.

On the day subsequent to these joyful events, Bertha, or more properly the lady Emily Neville, was again summoned to the royal pavilion, supported by the

Baroness and Alfred, and took her seat on the queen's right hand. Isabella, already arrived, stood the pale image of despair and guilt; she awaited with a last forlorn hope, the decrees of her fate.

The herald producing the papers as soon as silence was proclaimed, read aloud:—

“These records contain the history of Godfrey lord Baron of Neville, otherwise called, Sir Godfrey Brandon, with a full and explicit detail of the wrongs himself and heiress have sustained. In an iron chest, beneath the secret repository of the vaults of Brandon Abbey, is the original of this manuscript, of which this is an exact copy.

* * * * *

The herald, unfolding the remaining part of the envelope, read at full the secrets contained. Its contents were nearly word for word the same as those which Isabella destroyed.

A few remaining sentences filled the under side of the lost paper, which were as follows:—

“Beneath the surface of the forest there are subterraneous passages from the Abbey to the castle of Etherwold. My mind, fearful of mis-chance attending my child's future security; induced me to complete this second copy of my sad story, and placed them in the eastern chamber of the castle, that they may prove the means of redress to my orphan child!”

* * * * *

Here the papers ended; and the queen rising gave a silent signal to the herald, who leading Emily before the queen, the latter pronounced aloud—

“Welcome to the arms of England's queen, is she who preserved me, and her prince. Be the inheritance thou hast so long unjustly been deprived of, restored for ever, not only Baroness of Neville, but Countess of Clandale. We spare the guilty Isabella, but 'tis our award she enters, within ten days of the present time, a house of religious penitents, there to atone, in humility and seclusion, for the crimes of a mis-spent life.”

The towers of Etherwold, again received their injured mistress, amid the acclamation of her people's joy. The body of Egbert had been washed on shore. He was interred with every funeral pomp that could grace his remains.

Isabella, with sullen haughtiness, submitted to her fate, and was conducted to the destined monastery. No tear of remorse for the wrongs she had done, ever fell from her proud, inflexible soul.

The castle of Etherwold, on the joyful nuptial morn of its Baron and Baroness shone forth with resplendent gladness. The Baroness Elvina and Emily, were habited in robes of white. The latter was conducted by the former, through a crowd of noble visitors, to the chapel of the castle, where the Baron awaited his destined bride. The ceremony ended, the hall shook with repeated peals of joy from the tenantry and vassals, and Emily became indissolubly the partner of her adoring Alfred.

* * * * *

Here the pen pauses, unable to pursue its task:—The story of olden times are ended, so also ends the weak effort that has traced these imperfect characters.

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END.



the most beautiful and interesting garden in the world



ELMIRA;
OR,
THE MURDERED BRIDE.



CHAPTER I.

Dark were his brows, and gloomy to the sight
Like clouds—his eyes like meteors of the night.—OSSIAN.

The Stranger.

THE Duke De Valerio gave a splendid entertainment at his palace in Madrid, on occasion of a public exhibition, to which all the nobility and gentry were invited, in the true spirit of Castilian magnificence and hospitality. Madrid scarcely before had witnessed so great an assemblage of beauty, and no person of note was absent.

The night was beautiful and mild, such as spring produces when

warming into summer, and the gentle airs, that passed over a delightful garden, wafted a thousand perfumes through the gauze lattices which surrounded the large saloon, where the dancers were performing. The brilliance of dress shone amidst a blaze of tapers; and large venetian mirrors reflected and multiplied the various groups, animated with ever changing motion, with a sort of magic elegance; while the lively music of the orchestra awakened joy, and gave birth to pleasure in the coldest heart.

In the midst of this festivity a stranger entered, conducting a young lady, whose modesty appeared to shrink from the enquiring gaze of so numerous an assembly. The stranger appeared a man of near sixty, unbent by the pressure of time, his features were darkened by a heavy gloom which hung upon his brow. No smile illuminated his countenance as he entered this temple of gaiety; and, while he walked solemnly forward to the upper end, every eye bent upon him, and every tongue enquired who he could be.

The young Marquis De Velos was conversing with the Marquis Albert De Denia, when these interesting strangers entered. The Marquis of Denia started and turned pale as the strangers advanced; but recovering himself, he attended with a smile to the observations of his friend.

“What a charming lady!” said the Marquis De Velos, “do you observe the elegance of her form, the grace of her manner, and the modesty expressed in blushes on her countenance.”

“My dear Antonio,” replied the Marquis, “do you pretend to so much skill in female charms, as to form a judgment at this distance, and from a side view of the lady? Her veil half conceals her face; and you can but guess at what remains unseen.”

The lady, as if she had overheard this discourse, and was willing to comply with the curiosity of the gentlemen, turned her veil aside, and stealing a timid glance round the company, her eyes rested a moment on the two friends, and a visible confusion betrayed some secret emotion.

“Now, my friend,” said the Marquis De Velos, “now are you satisfied with my judgment? What expressive eyes, what sensibility of soul do they betray. Did you mark that charming smile, when her eyes turned upon me? what tenderness did it not speak!”

“Ha! ha!” returned Antonio, laughing, “you are jealous, Marquis. But observe, I speak first for her favour.”

“It is what I shall not dispute with you,” replied the Marquis of Denia with a serious air; “she is, I believe, already engaged.”

“Engaged, how!” cried Antonio with emotion “tell me to whom, and I will instantly dispatch him.”

“Your intentions are excellent,” replied the Marquis, preserv-

ing his gravity ; but your willingness to fight for the lady will not be rewarded :—your rival is infinitely superior to you—his claims are imperious, and undeniable—and no power on earth can resist them.”

“ You jest, Marquis,” replied Antonio.

“ I wish I could,” said his friend, with a sigh ; “ you will find what I say literally true :—it is an intelligence I learned not many hours since.”

“ Then you know her,” cried Antonio, with impatience ; “ tell me every thing about her. Who is she ?—who is this rival ?—where am I to find him ?—introduce me to their acquaintance.”

“ Patience !” cried the Marquis of Denia “ I dare not introduce myself. Nothing can be more strange to me, than to see that gloomy cavalier in this scene of joy ; his countenance is sufficient to damp the evening’s entertainment.”

“ You torture me !” exclaimed Antonio ; “ why do you trifle with me thus ?

“ I trifle with you !” replied the Marquis ; “ my dear friend you trifle with yourself. Go and select some lively partner, and think no more of a stranger whom you have now seen for the first time, and whom it is more than possible you may never see again.”

“ Do they leave Madrid then so soon ?—but I will follow them.”

“ I think not,” returned the Marquis ; “ she may remain in Madrid, and yet be concealed from your sight.”

“ Ha !” exclaimed Antonio “ now I begin to suspect !—they are going to seclude her in a convent, is this the rival of which you told me ?”

“ You have guessed but too truly,” answered his friend. “ This is what I am but now informed ; but I know so well the temper and disposition of Don Tavarro Padilla, that I have no reason to doubt the truth.”

“ But surely,” said Antonio “ were I to offer my hand, my rank, my titles, my domains, they would not be rejected.”

“ I fear they would,” answered the Marquis, with a deep sigh ; “ You know not this man ; his countenance is but a dark reflection of a blacker heart. He is a man, in whose mind some terrible crime is perpetually preying.”

“ But what is that crime,” demanded Antonio.

The Marquis startled at the question. “ What crime !” repeated he. “ What crime is that which can harrow up the soul of man with fearful visions, that turn tranquillity into warfare, and paint upon the serene brow the deformity of tempests ? But this is no place to speak on a subject such as this. Antonio my dear friend, I have much to say to you, and will appoint a

time. My introduction would be a drawback upon your welcome : — if therefore, after what I have hinted, you have any further inclination of forming an acquaintance with this imperious mortal, go, and trust to your own talents.”

The Marquis of Denia then withdrew precipitantly, leaving Antonio in a state of doubt and perplexity. The words of his friend had been so singular, that his curiosity was much excited, and he desired more than ever to become acquainted with those persons which had been the subject. “After all,” thought he, “there was much of incoherence in his words he seemed like a discarded lover who fears the success of a more fortunate rival. I can but meet a refusal; and surely this beautiful creature is at least worthy the hazard.”

The Marquis De Velos was yet young in life, and not easily checked in his undertakings; he immediately advanced towards the strangers, and, paying his respects to Don Padilla, requested the honour of dancing with the lady.

“She does not dance, Senor,” replied Padilla coldly.

“But perhaps she might be inclined for once to partake in that amusement,” said Antonio, “or wherefore attend a place in which every one is expected to share in the entertainment?”

“That is as I please,” answered Don Padilla frowning; “I hope, Senor, I am not accountable to you for my actions?”

The Marquis attempted to apologise, directing several tender glances towards the lady, who remained silent, without daring to raise her eyes from the ground.

“Do you reside in Madrid?” enquired the Marquis;

“I am now in Madrid,” answered Padilla; “You are very inquisitive young man—Do you know who I am?”

“I have not at present that honour,” returned De Velos; “but it is what I sincerely desire.”

“I must tell you,” said Padilla, rather rudely, “that desire is not reciprocal, Senor, this lady will not dance.”

The Marquis knew not what to reply: he bit his lips with vexation,—looked at the forbidding countenance of the gloomy stranger, and was inclined to walk away; but when his eye turned upon the lady, the visible distress that touched her lovely face with sadness, rivetted him to the spot; and conjuring up his effrontery, he said:—

“I was going to have tendered you my services had you been a new comer to the city; and should have been happy to have introduced you to the court.”

“And who told you that I had any designs of appearing there?” answered the unbending cavalier; “methinks you are wonderfully familiar.”

“I am sorry if I intrude,” said the Marquis.

"Then you will be so good as to immediately leave us," replied Padilla with a frown; and turning away his face, he assumed a look of severity which repelled every attempt to reply. Antonio bowed to the lady, and retiring to the opposite side of the saloon, employed himself in contemplating the astonishing contrast the gloominess of the father and the mildness of the daughter exhibited.

"Is it possible," said he to himself, "she can indeed be the daughter of this imperious mortal? the whole cast of her countenance is different. His is dark, savage, and inhuman; hers is open, mild, and good; her elevated forehead is a token of the elegance of her thoughts; her arched eyebrows show the playfulness of fancy; and her eyes are tempered with that sweetness, which dissolves into a smile upon her lips. And is this lady to be condemned to the solitude of a cloister? is her beauty only to be admired by monks? is she to be the companion of cold, miserable and repining nuns? is she to waste her charms upon withering time, within the walls of an unmerciful prison? Omnipotent disposer of human events! counteract so barbarous an injustice!"

While Antonio was lost in the reverie these reflections inspired, the strangers had withdrawn; and, when on looking up he beheld their absence, he started with disappointment and apprehension that he had lost them for ever. He hastened towards the door, and stopping a gentleman then entering—"which way did she go?" said he eagerly? "did you see them?"

"Down the middle walk of the garden," replied the cavalier; and, immediately the Marquis hurried away, without waiting for further particulars.

He advanced with hasty steps along the walk, discovering by moon-light a female figure before him, which from the shape he fancied was the lady he sought, though now she appeared with a long veil reaching nearly to the ground; his heart fluttered with delight at this unexpected opportunity, which he determined should not escape.

"Lady," said he, "this is a favour I had no hopes to receive from the hands of fortune. I have been in despair that I had no means of introduction; and now, when I least expected, I find myself for an instant happy in being able to speak to you unobserved."

"Oh, Senor," answered the lady, "this is too polite, you are so excessively obliging."

"Not so," replied the Marquis, a little surprised and greatly encouraged; "you must be aware, lady, that beauty like yours cannot be seen with indifference."

"Beauty like mine," replied the lady in a self-complacent tone; "really, Senor, you are the gallantest man——."

“Strange!” thought the marquis, “what a deception is a female face: who would have thought so amiable an appearance should conceal such a character. “May I be permitted,” continued he, in a more free way than he had at first dared to assume; “may I be permitted again to behold those charms which that odious veil conceals, before they shall be for ever secluded in a gloomy convent.”

“Heaven forbid!” exclaimed the lady, “Holy Virgin, how you fright me! a convent, Senor! No I am not old enough for that I hope. No, no, believe me, I know better.”

“Then I am again deceived,” said Antonio to himself; “surely my friend would not have betrayed me! But is this indeed the lady I have been so much enamoured of at first view?—Am I not deceiving myself?—If,” said he, “you are not bent upon entering a convent, why, lady, do you thus conceal your charms,—or is it in mercy to mankind?”

“Oh, I have a great deal of mercy in my nature,” replied she, “but you gay cavaliers never make half so many compliments as when our veils hide us from your curiosity. Beauty is always best when it is fancied, Senor.”

“But yours is no fancied beauty, lady; permit me to remove this drapery, and contemplate the reality,—heavens!” involuntarily exclaimed he, on beholding the haggard visage of an old lady, who had long since been the jest of half Madrid, for an affectation of manners and dress to which she had no pretensions. Antonio was too much confounded at his mistake and loss of time, to be polite: and the lady turned angrily away, railing on the ill-breeding of the present age.

The Marquis was too much untuned to be in harmony with pleasure. He sauntered along the walks of the garden, musing on the strange character of Don Padilla: and encouraging a hope, that however singular the behaviour of his friend, he would be able to learn sufficient from him at least to introduce himself at the residence of the strangers.

He advanced nearer the saloon, where the laugh of hilarity, and the notes of joy sounded upon his ear, producing a sensation which he had never before felt in its full force—the stillness of the gardens increasing the contrast. The pale moon scattered its silver rays upon the foliage, amongst which, scarcely a zephyr was heard to interrupt the silence of nature. The birds had hung their heads beneath their wings, and stillness reigned around, when he was suddenly alarmed by repeated screams, and a burst of confusion mingled with cries of distress.

He hastened to discover the occasion of the tumult, when he perceived one of the lattices in flames, and at once understood the disaster that had happened. Ever alive to relieve the dis-

tressed, he hastened to the saloon, where so much confusion reigned, that every one retarded the other, and themselves by pressing to be first. With a strong arm he tore down one of the window frames which reached to the ground, and forcing his way in, found the mischief not half so extensive as he had feared—the fire having only taken hold of some ornamental scenery and the lattice frame.

He was surprised to see the Marquis of Denia busily employed in extinguishing the flames, while he had supposed him far distant; but as he turned round to speak to him, he distinguished the lady he had been seeking, fainting upon a sofa, unregarded by any one; each being willing in the confusion to take care of themselves, or those more immediately interesting to them.

Every other consideration gave way to regard for her safety. Her senses were wholly overcome with the terror she had suffered, and raising her in his arms, he endeavoured to press through the crowd, fearful that every moment might be too late, the heat and smoke being excessive, though the danger of the fire was over. It was impossible to make way through the tumult, many of the ladies being in a similar state, and he had to remain in the most agonizing suspense, till the Marquis of Denia came to his assistance. Between them they supported the unconscious maid into the garden, where the sudden change of air awoke her to recollection.

“Ah! Cavalier,” said she, in a tone of deepest softness, as she fixed her eyes upon Denia, “is it to you I owe this obligation? But where is my father?”

“Don Padilla,” replied the Marquis, “was not in the room when the accident happened; be not concerned on his account, Elmira, depend on his safety. But why are you in Madrid, when I had reason to believe you so many leagues distant? And how is your sister?”

The Marquis de Velos had till now sat upon a bench, supporting the lady with his arms, and gazing upon her countenance expressive of hope and despair; but suddenly starting at this address of his friend, he felt a pang of jealousy cross his heart. “How is this, Marquis,” said he, “do you deal treacherously, are you so well acquainted with the lady?”

“Is this Cavalier your friend?” said she, turning her fine eyes upon Antonio, and speaking to the Marquis.

“That is as he behaves,” answered Denia, with a smile; “he is apt to be very passionate, Senora, and he is now angry that I should share with him the pleasure of having rescued you from the tumult.”

“Confusion!” muttered Antonio, while he looked first upon

one, and then on the other, unable to determine how much he should believe.

“Pardon me, Senor,” said Elmira, turning to him, “if I omitted you, in my thanks to your friend ; but indeed, I am so confused that——” Her embarrassment prevented her finishing the words she intended, and Albert De Denia to relieve her went on. “This, lady Elmira, is the Marquis Antonio De Velos ; a Cavalier, who, since he has formed an attachment to a strange lady, has lost the right use of his understanding, and——.” “Forbear I beg,” cried Antonia impatiently. “this is trifling beyond sufferance.” Then turning to Elmira——“since,” said he, “I have been so fortunate as to have again the pleasure of seeing you, when my hopes were almost extinguished, will you have the goodness to say, when and where I may enquire after your health, which I very much fear will suffer by this night’s surprise ?”

“At present,” said Elmira, in a low voice, “I am with my father at the palace of the Count Portenza ; but I feel myself so much recovered, that I hope I shall find no farther ill effects, I confess I was very much terrified when I found the whole saloon in flames.”

“What a contrast does the present moment afford,” said Antonio, pointing to the saloon, (where all was silent, and a solitary taper alone lighted, in place of a thousand that had lately blazed). “Now an hour since, and the whole was a scene of the most splendid brilliance and joy—no mind presaged the sudden event that was to overthrow the entertainment in terror and confusion. So in real life we enjoy ourselves on the bank of a precipice.

Elmira shuddered—a deep sigh acknowledged the truth, and looking round she perceived the Marquis of Denia had left them. Antonio felt obliged for this action of his friend. He hesitated a moment and then said——“can it be true, lady, that you have chosen to retreat from the world, at an age when you are but scarce entered into it ?”

“And should such a choice surprise ?” answered Elmira ; is it not necessary, if I would avoid the application of what you have just spoken. I know but little of the world ; yet from that little I have learnt the transience of human happiness—and have seen, that when we fancied ourselves most certain of pleasure, we have been nearest distress.”

“And have you known sorrow ?” said Antonio tenderly, and taking her hand. “Hard must have been the heart that could have given grief to such a subject. But do not forget, that to the world we have some duties that claim us to ourselves, and which are inimical to monastic seclusion.”

“True, most true,” answered Elmira with a sigh. But the first

duty of a daughter is obedience; and I must obey the commands of my father."

The last words were scarcely pronounced, when her voice dropt into silence, and the figure of Don Padilla stood before them.

"Where have you been?" said he sternly. "Ha! follow me, daughter," then seizing the hand of the trembling maid, he stalked indignantly away, without deigning to notice Antonio.

"Strange!" thought the Marquis. "What a monster to use with such severity a lady, whom I would gladly protect in my arms; and who, if my judgment is clear, is exactly the companion I should wish to share my idle hours, and the bounties which heaven, through the means of my ancestors, has bestowed upon me."



The company had some time left the gardens; and finding it late he departed, intending to call upon his friend early in the morning for an explanation of several sentences he could not understand? and which by turns gave birth to jealousy, curiosity and doubt. He imputed much to the incomprehensible character of the Marquis; who was often remarked by his friends as inconsistent in his actions and expressions: sometimes overwhelmed with impenetrable sadness, and at others mingling with the gayest company.

As Antonio passed along the streets which were now solitary and forsaken, he perceived two men in close conversation, standing at a corner ; he made little doubt of their being robbers, as he could perceive them looking round while they spoke with apparent anxiety. Being on the dark side of the way, and the moon shining bright, he had opportunity of observing them unseen—he paused to reflect, whether he should watch them, or give the alarm to the guard. While he considered, a third person joined them ; and after a few words, they crossed the street, and began to move quickly towards the place where Antonio stood. Antonio doubted not, but he was discovered ; and, clapping his hand upon his sword, stood upon his guard.

The first person who came near immediately perceived him, and said in a low voice, “ Antonio De Velos, follow me.”

“ For what purpose ?” demanded Antonio ; “ and whither ?”

“ For my pleasure, and where I please ;” answered the other, in a rough voice.

“ That must be as I please too,” said Antonio, drawing. You may perhaps think your numbers will frighten me—come on !”

“ Ha ! ha ! ha !” cried the stranger, laughing ; “ well, you are certainly brave.” And Antonio immediately knew the voice of his friend.

“ You again !” cried he ; “ you are wrapped in mystery to night : but who are these in your train ?”

“ Your servants and mine,” replied the Marquis. “ When I first quitted the room, I put them upon the scent to find the dwelling of Don Padilla ; not having any expectation we should have had an opportunity of discovering it ourselves ; and now if you are not inclined to sleep, we will go to my palace.”

“ You are a clever fellow at intrigue,” said Antonio : “ but tell me, Marquis, and on honour, if all this trouble is on mine, or your own account ?”

“ Can you not be contented with the benefit of the event, without enquiring the motive ?” returned Albert, “ it was both, my dear Antonio ; bury your suspicions, and remember I am your friend.”

They were not long before they arrived at the Marquis of Denia’s, where having taken some refreshment, and provided a couple of bottles of wine, the Marquis, dismissed the servants, and carefully locked the door.

“ You make use of great precaution,” said Antonio, looking round him ; “ is it treason we are going to debate upon ?” “ No,” answered Albert solemnly, “ it is not treason—yet it is not fit for every mortal ear ; the mysteries of fate are unsearchable ; and we know not the manner in which the darkest deeds meet the light.”

“Deeds of what?” said Antonio, gazing with surprise upon his friend. “What is it you say?—what has this to do with Elmira?”

“Much, perhaps, too much,” said the Marquis, drawing his chair to the table. “But now, Antonio, look at the hand of that clock—it is upon the hour of One,—at this dread hour of midnight promise me secrecy—swear to me—”

“But where there is no crime, can secrecy be necessary?” observed Antonio, “and where there is a crime, secrecy becomes a fault. You are strangely altered within these few minutes, Marquis.”

“I am,” replied Albert: “my levity is always assumed. I have at my heart a corroding poison that chills the moments of my existence; and dashes from me the cup of pleasure, when I attempt to raise it to my lips. I once had a friend, the confidant of my soul—but he is now lost to me, and I would take you in his place.”

“You are in love, then!” exclaimed Antonio, with a languid smile. “I see where this will end.”

“I **AM** in love,” replied the Marquis, emphatically, “but not as you imagine, with Elmira; therefore, your heart may rest. Did you ever hear that I could be guilty of a dishonourable act? The secret I would trust you with, has little relation to any thing your warmest fancy can suggest. Will you promise me then?”

“I heartily acknowledge, I never knew you guilty of a meanness,” replied Antonio. “To say the truth, could such a suspicion have had being in my mind, you had never called me friend: yet at the same time, this ceremony seems as though you doubted me. But, to humour you, I swear—by the holy mass, never will I, without your own consent, reveal what you shall now disclose!”

“’Tis enough,” said the Marquis, taking his hand, “from this moment let there be the most unlimited confidence between us. Prepare yourself to give credit to things which require your faith; and remember, that it is the Marquis Albert De Denia, who relates them.” He paused; and looking solemnly round the room, leaned his arm upon the table, and thus began.

CHAPTER II.

Ye unknown pow'rs which hover round mankind
Guard us, when fate sits brooding in the wind.

The Miniature.

YOU must remember Fernando de Coello, who was my particular friend from our earliest youth ; his family is noble, and I believe he is a distant relation of yours.

“ He is my first cousin,” said Antonio, “ and his sudden death gave me considerable grief.”

“ You surprise me,” cried the Marquis ; “ tell me how ?—when did you receive this information ;”

“ I can say nothing for certain,” answered Antonio ; “ my information reaches merely to the report, that he was slain in battle with the Moors.”

“ Report is a common liar,” said the Marquis ; “ I am glad to find you are not better informed. I will now proceed.——”

“ When we were extremely young we served together in the army, and were rarely asunder but when duty, or our visits to our friends in Madrid required. This companionship in dangers, in romantic adventures, and the variety to which a soldier's life is ever liable, at once endeared us to each other, and opened our minds to that genial and genuine friendship which, like love, renders trifles of great importance, and gives birth to that communication of fancy, heroism used to inspire.

“ The leisure of a camp gave our minds opportunity to trace the histories of preceding times ; and if we were not tinctured with superstition, we at least took delight in romance. Having been to chastise some insurgents in the provinces, we were quartered in the city of Granada. The beauty of that charming country, and the extensive prospects from the mountain of Sierra Nivada, covered with vegetation, and crowned with eternal snow, frequently invited us to ramble.

“ Sometimes we climbed the heights, and gratified our senses with contemplating a region of enchantment. The hills were overspread with vines and olives ; the vallies were clothed, and odoriferous with a thousand flowering shrubs, of which the edges were formed—sweet basil intermingled with myrtle. Thyme and lavender grew wild upon the wastes ; and the golden tinted saffron delighted the eye amidst a profusion of flowers. The Mediterranean closed the distant prospect with its blue waves ; over which, the adventurous bark was frequently seen to glide, like a dark spot on its pellucid surface.

“ Our duty at the castle of Alkambra was trifling, not being a part of the garrison ; and we consequently had much time upon our hands to indulge our propensity for rambling.

“ On one of those occasions, we walked beyond the city to a considerable distance, following the winding banks of the Douro, amused with the variety of scenery it presented, when we arrived at a grove of tall chesnut trees we had never visited before. The coolness of the shade invited us to rest ; and we sat down on the flowery bank, which sloped to the river, regarding the transparent current as it passed, and discoursing on those adventures of which, as soldiers, we had many to recount.

“ While we admired the beauty of the fertile country, which now presented to our sight the turrets of several ruined buildings, recalled to us the distress which the Moors had suffered, when driven from the country of their birth, and the lands of their cultivation, by an edict, at once cruel and impolitic ; and which had converted in a few months this whole province into an howling waste, filled it with rapine and slaughter, torn husbands from their wives, and children from their parents, rent asunder the bonds of friendship and civil union, and banished more than nine hundred thousand people to the desarts of Africa.

“ While we were discoursing on this subject, and expressing our indignation at its folly, we perceived a small boat floating down the stream, apparently without any guide ; and, as the eddy of the wave set it towards the shore where we sat, it could not but excite our attention.

“ Now for a famous adventure of knight errantry, said Fernando, who knows but some redoubtable magician has sent this enchanted boat, to convey us to some terrible castle, where a fair lady waits the event of our prowess, to be delivered from the tyrant of the ironhand.

“ I smiled at this conceit, and in the thought of the moment replied, Well, Sir Knight, if your courage be undaunted, and you dare brave the perils of the adventure, I require you on the faith of a knight good and true, to accompany me in the achievement of this adventure.

“ Most willingly, Sir Knight be it unto life or death, I will accomplish the exploit, cried Fernando with humour, leaping into the boat, which the waves had driven close upon the bank. I did not remain behind—and we put off into the middle of the current.

“ The vessel of which we had thus taken possession was a small pleasure boat, and seemed to have drifted from its mooring, there being only one oar on board, which served merely to guide, without advancing our progress ; an accident which added to our amusement, as it seemed we were wholly to depend upon chance.

A bottle of excellent brandy, and some Italian sweet-meats stored our bark ; which we received as an intimation that modern Knights were not expected to live upon love and air, like ancient heroes.

“ The day being extremely fine, we took much pleasure in our adventure ; we continued our voyage, slowly winding amongst the romantic scenery, which now appeared level with the water, and now overhung the liquid mirror, which inverted and reflected the foliage in lengthened and darkened groves.

“ We beheld the ruins of several moorish palaces and castles at a distance, and passed a few vessels laden with grain and oil. Our bark moved insensibly along, gliding beneath the dark cliffs, which were crowned with evergreen laurels. The spires of Granada were lost far behind us ; and it was not till towards evening we remembered the necessity of our return.

“ With some difficulty we put the boat round ; and we then found the truth of that proverb, which tells us —it is easiest to swim with the stream. We were at a considerable distance from the city, and to mend our situation the wind began to blow pretty strong.

“ It was now we began to repent our adventure. We found it impossible to make way against the stream with only one oar ; and we were under the necessity of putting round again, with an intention to land at the first place where there appeared any probability of procuring a conveyance back to Granada.

“ The sun meanwhile slowly declined in majestic, but sullen grandeur. Deep black clouds heavily rose from the far distant ocean, through which his purple beams seemed to break with difficulty, tinging their borders with flame ; the mountains and forests caught the lurid reflection, glowing with a partial and transient lustre. The wind hurried us along, and the waves began to rise, with an eddy, that was far from pleasant to such unskilful mariners in an open boat.

“ This is likely to be no comfortable adventure, said Fernando ; I would we had remained on known ground and not trusted ourselves we know not where. If we should chance to fall upon any of those straggling parties of insurgents which still remain lurking in secret places, it may not be so pleasant.

“ I was not more satisfied with our situation ; but taking up the brandy, Come my friend, said I, this is an enchanted liquor, furnished by our invisible guide for the banishment of care. Having refreshed ourselves with the remains of the sweetmeats, we sat still, looking out anxiously for some place of shelter, and watching the quick approach of night.

The sun was not long sunk beneath the horizon, before the rain began in large drops to patter on the surface of the water.

We would then willingly have put on shore, content with the shelter of the trees, but here it was so broken and rocky, that we durst not venture the slight vessel too near, lest it might be bulged by the force of the wind and stream, which drove us forward at a rapid rate.

“In half an hour we perceived through the gloom that enveloped us, the ruins of a Moorish Castle, which projected boldly to the water’s edge. The main tower which was circular, appeared nearly complete, but the other parts of the building presented only an extensive mass of ruins, spreading over a large space of ground.

“We were by this time nearly wet through, notwithstanding a piece of old sail-cloth, which we had contrived to spread over us. The storm had not, however, yet arisen to its height—the great body of clouds moving on very heavily, and we endeavoured to incline the boat towards this ruin, which might at least shelter us from its fury. We found ourselves unexpectedly in a strong current, which set forcibly towards the foot of the tower; and we began to be apprehensive it might wreck us on the rocks.

“This is truly astonishing Marquis, said Fernando, what are we now to think of the adventure?

“There wants nothing but a twinkling taper from some of the loop-holes, a gaurdian dragon, and a drawbridge, returned I, to complete it. But, seriously, I wish we were well over the night. That pile bears upon it the marks of violence—and no doubt its dark recesses are a retreat to some disaffected party.

“Of them I have no fear, replied Fernando; we have each of us a sword that has been tried, and done service.—I am resolved to finish the adventure. We have hitherto been conducted in a very singular way; and though, my friend, we may smile at enchantment, and magic, and spells, yet there are mysteries in nature with which we are unacquainted. I myself—He suddenly checked himself at these words: and I could not avoid smiling at his manner, which I imputed to the concurrence of circumstances, such as might have generated superstition in any man.

“The night, from the blackness of the clouds, was profoundly dark; and we remained a few moments in silence.

“Now, said he, will you believe the boat has fixed upon the steps which lead from the water-edge up the rock to the castle.—What can this mean?

“Mean! replied I, it means nothing extraordinary. Do you not perceive, that the current we are fallen into is caused by the water running into the moat which surrounds the building! let us endeavour to make it fast, and try to find a shelter.

“Fernando remained silent, gazing upon the tower, which

appeared as if blackened by fire, and awfully gloomy through the storm ; being only distinctly visible when the flashes of lightning reflected against its sides. After groping some time with the oar, I discovered a ring, to which we fastened the boat, and ascended the stone steps, cut in the solid rock—a dozen brought us to the landing. The lightning served us for a guide ; distinguishing a small porch entire, within which we found the postern gate broken down, leading into the tower.

“ Within, the deepest darkness prevailed ; and it was at the utmost hazard, we ventured to advance, arm in arm, with our swords extended before us, to avoid, if possible, running against any projection, or falling down some flight of steps. In this manner we advanced along a narrow passage, till we were checked by a stair that we judged wound up to the higher apartments. After a moment’s consideration, we resolved to hazard the event—curiosity impelling us onwards.

“ The place being narrow, I advanced first, cautiously proceeding, when, on a sudden I found myself violently seized by the arm, and Fernando, in a low voice, demanded if I heard nothing ?

“ Death ! cried I, what do you hear ? what, or who, have you suffered to pass ? At the same time I endeavoured to release my arm from the grasp of I knew not what ; but which, to my imagination, seemed to hold me stronger than a dozen men. Nothing has passed, replied Fernando ; it is I who have hold on your arm ;—Heavens how you tremble ! did not you hear a noise ?

“ You ! said I, checking my vexation and inclination to laugh, on my word, I thought myself in the paws of some fiend, it is in vain to deny it. But what did you hear ?—Hark ! surely I heard a hollow murmuring sound !—we had better retreat and brave the storm.

“ No, replied Fernando, no ; we will either advance or perish. I felt assured at this confidence, and ashamed of my own fears.

“ Come on then, said I, my brave fellow ! we have before this entered a breach together, and shall we be afraid because it is dark, and the wind sighs along the passages ?

“ This flight of stairs led to a landing, which opening wide, we fancied ourselves in some chamber, and paused while the thunder rolled over us, and shook the building to its base.

“ The lightning that flashed through the long narrow loop-holes, allowed us to distinguish a few objects, which were seen for a moment, and then involved in tenfold darkness. No furniture appeared in the room, except a broken bench, the head of a rusty pike, and a Moorish turban. We sat down upon the bench,

leaning upon our swords, and watching more attentively than if surrounded by an hostile camp. Several times we fancied that some voice passed along the wind, which sounded loudly through the avenues; now howling along the passages, and then dying away in gentle sighings. Amidst the intermission of the thunder we heard the lashings of the waves against the shore, and the rain poured down in rushing torrents.

“A vivid flash of lightning, which seemed to sleep upon the floor, for a few moments wholly illuminated the chamber; and the succeeding flashes occurred with such quick succession, that a constant blaze filled the chamber.

“What is that? said Fernando in a whisper—where? demanded I. Look in that corner to the right, Albert, said he. Do you not see that dark bundle?—It is either a murdered traveller, or some person wrapped in a cloak.—Most probably some robber, whispered he.



“I see it, replied I, and the next instant the lightning again left us in total darkness. Let us plunge our swords into him while he sleeps, added I, in a low voice; we must prevent him doing us a mischief in the dark. Not so either, whispered Fernando, it may be some innocent stranger: at most, he is but one to two, let us advance cautiously and examine him before he shall awake and alarm his comrades, if he has any.

“ We proceeded gently across the floor, which creaked beneath our feet. I stooped down, and took hold of the dark wrapper—a burst of thunder, which rolled and broke over the roof with a tremendous crash, caused me to start away with involuntary horror.

“ Perhaps, said Fernando, in a low solemn voice, it is for me this strange business is reserved—I will examine the bundle.

“ He traced cautiously over it, to discover if it owned a human shape, and pressing his hand upon it, it made no other resistance than a bundle of cloth, and he became satisfied it was no human being. It was bound round with a leathern belt, which he cut through with his sword, and shaking it by the middle, something fell heavy upon the ground, and a piece of metal rolled to a distance.

“ Hush ! said he, I thought I heard a sound !—Very probable, said I ; ’tis most likely the robbers to whom this booty belongs, and our curiosity will be rewarded. I stepped a little on one side to prepare for an attack, the wind being so loud that I frequently fancied voices and footsteps were approaching ; my foot hit against something hard, and stooping down, I found it to be a dagger without a case, I drew it through my fingers to judge of its size and shape ; and, from its roughness, fancied it to be rusty.

“ Yes, said Fernando, with a sigh so deep, that it almost amounted to a groan ; no doubt it is rusty—dipped in the blood of some innocent, by the hand of rapine or revenge :—give it me—I will preserve it.

“ I could not but admire the strange alteration he had undergone within these few hours ; and though he appeared more forward and hardy than myself, I could not but fancy it was excess of fear, which I had often seen produce the greatest show of bravery.

“ It was now past midnight, the storm was evidently going further, and the lightnings flashed at a distance through the horizon.

“ I fear, said I, for our little bark, which is most likely dashed into pieces against the rocks, and we shall have some difficulty in returning to Granada.

“ That same POWER, replied Fernando, which conducted us here, can lead us back.

“ And are you really of opinion, my friend, answered I, that an invisible power did lead us to this ruined castle ?

“ I am most certain, said he, and paused as if musing on some distant thought.

“ Then you believe in magic ? you believe that intangible beings can act on corporeal substance ?

“ I do. I have reasons, my friend reasons that would convince yourself.

“ I would then willingly hear them, said I ; I have been your companion these five years, in toils, in hardships, and in dangers, and you never informed me of this.

“ Never, replied he gravely: I endeavoured myself to forget, but this strange adventure returns my memory strong upon me, and harrows up my imagination. I will speak low for I am satisfied this place has inhabitants— but whether they be mortal or no, I know not. I had no mind to interrupt him, for his gravity and the solemnity of the impenetrable darkness conspired to raise images of horror.

“ Do you not remember, nine months ago upon this very day, I entered the age of manhood ; and was interrupted in our intention of keeping that event with a little feast amongst our comrades, by an order to join a party going out to forage ? Do you not remember, that I returned to you so pale and altered that you hardly knew me ? and that I imputed the cause to a sudden illness which had seized me ?

“ I remember, said I.

“ And so do I, continued he, I shall remember it for ever ! Our way lay through a deep defile, overhung with gloomy cork trees, and so intricate that we feared every moment falling into an ambuscade. The pass was so gloomy that it appeared like the twilight of evening, and, being the chief in command, I halted in the rear, to see that no stragglers remained behind. When the whole party had passed, I followed into the defile ; the sound of steps behind me, caused me to turn round, when I perceived another soldier apparently lame ; yet I thought he moved forward amazingly quick for a wounded man.

“ I was a little surprised, as I had not observed any man behind, and halted till he came up, intending to reprimand him for his negligence.

“ What’s the matter, cried I that you hang so far behind your comrades ?—What accident have you met with ?

“ Fernando Coello, said he in a tone like that of a dying man, I have received a mortal blow ; you alone can relieve me.

“ How is that to be done friend ? enquired I ; where are you hurt ?

“ Deep, deep, said he ; my hurt is here: laying his hand upon his breast.—Tis you alone can cure me. —Promise me you will.

“ Why should I promise you ? said I ; I am no surgeon, but I will see you properly taken care of. He shook his head and sighed.

“ You surely would not have me promise what I cannot perform ?

“You can, answered he; You alone can—. You must promise me, Fernando Coello; this is your birth day, and you shall promise me.

“But why? who are you? demanded I, astonished at the familiarity of a man dressed like a common soldier.

“Who I am signifies not, returned he, in an elevated voice: such as I am may you never be. Many are my wrongs, and my wounds are deep. You, you, Fernando Coello, are the man in all the earth who must redress me.—Promise that you will. Swear by the rolling orbs—by the great deeps of earth’s foundations—swear——

“You are mad, said I, alarmed at his manner: you talk strangely.

“But I am not therefore mad, replied he; every thing about me is strange—strange as the grave. But fate, deep and dark, terrible and eternal fate sits over your house, unless you give me this promise.

“Tell me quick then, said I, what am I to do, the troops are proceeding and I shall be too late.

“You will be indeed too late, replied he, if you do not resolve instantly. The fortune of your house depends on the decision of this moment—give me your word, or die. I cannot describe to you how strangely I was affected; there was something so shockingly solemn in his voice, that it pierced to my inmost soul; and, believing that there could be nothing very particular in promising my aid to a wounded man, I replied, I grant your request; I promise to right your wrongs, if I have the power, and to cure your wounds, if I have the means.

“You are mine! you are mine! you are mine! cried he, three times, in a voice of exultation, give me your hand.

“I held out my hand and he took hold of it, but his touch was the touch of death, damp, clammy, and cold, it chilled my veins, creeping through them with indescribable horror. At that moment, I heard the trumpet sound to a quick march, and turning round my face, I looked again, and no one stood near me. I was struck with so much astonishment (for had this appearance been human, I am certain it could not have escaped me,) that though we had a smart action with the enemy, the impression remains indelible.

“Have you never heard or seen any thing since of this strange apparition? said I, are you certain your imagination was not deluded with chimeras?

“Certain, replied he, till the adventure of this night, I had hoped never to see or hear farther; but now I fear I shall be called on to the performance of that fatal promise. This dagger—what sound is that? I am certain I heard a step!

“Some one advances, said I, be prepared. We sat still, scarcely venturing to breathe. A slow step advanced up the stairs, and entered the chamber. It passed distinctly across the room, pausing as if to listen between every step till it went through the opposite avenue. It was not till then, Fernando acquired courage to speak.

“Who knows, said he, but this may be the wounded soldier ! yet, what should he do here ?

“I rather think, said I, that it is some assassin, or freebooter, in the dark. Who goes there ? said I aloud.

“Who goes there ? replied a voice in the same tone. Answer me cried I, are you a friend ?—Are you a friend, returned the voice.

“This is strange, said Fernando, in a whisper ; then speaking aloud, if you are a friend, advance ! advance, returned the voice, and again all was silent.

“This is most singular, observed Fernando, in a whisper, do you hear any sound of footsteps ?

“None, answered I ; I did not observe which way the person went, who, I am certain passed us. I will find it out, cried Fernando, aloud. Find it out ! replied the voice.

“This is a very good-humoured spirit, said I, glancing at once upon the truth ; when you speak above the common tone, the hollow pile re-echoes the sound. We then repeated aloud several sentences, admiring the effect which had so startled us ; but we could not by this means account for the person who had certainly crossed the chamber.

“The gay line of dawning day breaking over the distant hills, we began to lose much of our apprehension, and to feel a curiosity to examine the building which had so much excited our fears. Through the narrow loop-hole we watched the distant and gradual increase of light, dispersing the blue mists which curled over the hills ; where yet, no prominent feature could be distinguished.

“When the light rendered objects perceptible, we ventured to ascend the winding stairs, which led to the battlements where we were enchanted with the beauty of the prospect. The cool fragrant air of the morning breathed over the reviving plants ; whose colours, by the rain of the night, were enlivened and deepened. The flowers began already to open their leaves to the coming day, and the clear sky assumed the blush, which fore-runs the approaching sun.

“We beheld at a great distance the turrets of Granada ; and whichever way the eye turned, the senses were delighted with a profusion of vegetation.

“We were not without some apprehension of the person who had passed us in the night, as he probably was lurking in some

secret part of the building, or might have joined his comrades, with intent to fall upon us with a force we should be unable to withstand. Our boat we saw beneath us a wreck upon the landing place, and we descended again to our chamber, to consult on our mode of proceeding.

“The bundle we had half examined in the night, now attracted our attention. On the floor at some distance, lay a small portrait, which had fallen. Fernando took it up, and holding it to the light, exclaimed—

“What an admirable countenance! what expression! what tenderness! Ah! my friend, if the original lives; and I could find her, I would immediately engage for life.

“I should smile to see you in love with a picture, said I; but how came it here?

“How? cried he, with a look of horror. Ah! Marquis, you have awakened in my breast the most bitter anguish. Surely no ruffian hand could deform so lovely a countenance—a countenance that might charm fiends into admiration.

“But she is dressed in the Moorish fashion; she is perhaps one of those who have suffered from the edict of Philip, said I.

“Pray do not name it, replied Fernando; the very suspicion kills me.—Look at the mouth—Heavens! what an inimitable smile! the very lips seem parting, to speak a sentiment of kindness! I advanced, and opening the bundle, found it to consist of a Moorish dress, very much spoiled with damp and time, and stained in several places with blood.

“This is not a lady’s dress, said I, it has most likely belonged to some traveller, and that is the portrait of his mistress. I do not admire this dismal-looking place; it is more horrible by day than by night—murder seems written upon the walls and violence sits upon the battlements! Let us go.

“Fernando still examined the picture, which he could not enough admire; at length his attention turned upon the bundle which I was separating, and he agreed with me, that it could not have lain in so exposed a situation for the time, the fashion distinguished its form, or it would have at least been rotten with damp: it appeared more probable that it had been brought thither by some freebooter; and was not unlikely to belong to the person we were certain had found concealment somewhere, as we had noticed his ascent, but had heard no more of him.

“We will endeavour to find him, said Fernando, most likely he can give an account of this picture, and that fatal habit, stained with blood, and pierced most likely with this dagger. From the little corridor two stairs presented—the one narrow and winding, leading immediately to the battlements; the other, the main staircase to the upper rooms. All the doors had

been burnt or broken down by violence, presenting a free passage over the whole tower. We ascended without difficulty, and entered the higher suite of rooms, consisting of three chambers. We looked round with suspicious care, but not the smallest vestige of an inhabitant appeared. We examined the flooring, that no secret trap-door might escape us --most of these antique structures having very singular concealments. We were upon the point of returning, when Fernando remarked the traces of muddy feet upon the floor, and we followed them into the second chamber, where we suddenly lost them; nor could all our skill discover any possible place of concealment, or way of escape.

“Tired with so fruitless a search, we returned to the first chamber, and thence to the ground floor, cautiously examining every place that promised any information, and carrying with us the garments we had found.

“From the extensive pile of ruins, and many fallen columns of marble, it was easy to trace the once magnificent and extensive structure. The marks of fire were visible on the whole; and it was probably the great solidity of the remaining tower which had rescued it from the general conflagration.

“Not being able to make any farther discovery, we began on foot our journey back to Granada. I knew not what to think of the story Fernando had told me; because though I was certain of his veracity as though I had been myself witness of the fact, yet so long a time having passed without further intimation, induced me to fancy there must have been some deception, which the gloominess of the defile had favoured; then on the other hand, our recent adventure bore every mark of superstitious romanticity, though it might yet be no more than a curious concurrence of circumstances.

“At Granada we made several inquiries concerning the Moorish castle; but gained no information relating to our adventure. We learnt that it had formerly been a palace belonging to a Moorish prince; that it had since descended to the family of Ferendez; and had finally been burnt under the edict of Philip as affording shelter to the resisting party.”

CHAPTER III.

Harke ! the ravenne flappes hys wynges
 In the briere'd delle belowe ;
 Harke ! the dethe-owl loude dothe synge
 To the nyghte-mares as heie go.

CHATTERTON.

The Fortune Teller.

“ Fernando became every day more enraptured with the portrait, visiting every place of public resort, from the church down to the lowest public walks, in hopes of meeting, if not the original, at least some figure which might distantly approach. He frequently complained to me of the cruel singularity of his fate, in not so much as knowing whether his mistress were living or dead, young or old.

“ I constantly ridiculed this singular whim ; and, as our troops were soon to quit Granada, I advised him to throw away the picture, and the dagger, and laugh with me at the whole adventure. He became more reserved in his behaviour ; and I was not sorry to be less troubled with his wonders and conjectures about the origin of the miniature, which he would willingly have made the constant theme of our discourse.

“ In about a fortnight we quitted Granada ; and after a tedious march of some days, entered the province of Andalusia. At the first village on the road, we halted with as many men as the place would receive ; the rest of the party going forward.

“ As we entered the yard of our inn, we found a travelling fortune teller ; one of those men who sell amulets and charms, who vend among country peasants philtres to procure affection, and are a nuisance in every society where they are tolerated. He was mounted on a tub in the inn yard, and surrounded with a gaping crowd of villagers and muleteers, who were amused with his grotesque gestures, and eager to buy his drugs.

“ We took our station a little on one side, admiring the simplicity of the peasants, who believed him first physician to the Emperor of China.

“ Is it possible, said I to Fernando, the credulity of mankind can be so absurd as to believe a man who, by his own account, is the richest upon earth, and who yet will play more tricks than a baboon, for a maravidie ?

“ He overheard this observation ; for our figures had attracted his attention, and turning suddenly round,—Senors, said he, with

a penetrating look, "I know that which you want to know. The secrets I possess no other man inherits."

Fernando immediately took this speech to himself, which, in fact, was no more than the general cant of these fellows; but the perplexity of his mind made him catch at every thing that inclined towards mystery. "Let us now enter," said he, and "refresh ourselves, we will examine this man, after the villagers are gone."

"Very well," answered I, "we will both have our fortunes told. The rogue has seen by our dress that we are of quality, and will make his guesses accordingly; but in the first place—here, host! what have you got for supper?" The host was a jolly dark complexioned fellow, and thrusting his hands into his belt, he replied:—



"Please you, my senors, it grieves me to say how bare we are at present of provisions. These doctors carry such a train with them, that every thing is swept away where they come. I verily believe all the pigs and fowls in Andalusia would not stay their stomachs a fortnight; and then, as to salads, they cleared my whole garden in a night, like a swarm of locusts."

"Have you got any eggs?—Can we have an omelet," demanded Fernando.—"No, senors," replied he bowing, "I have not an egg, nor any onions, nor garlic; and beside, it is not a fast-day, so that we have no fish in the whole village."

“Do you know us?” cried Fernando impatiently: “Do you know it is at your peril thus to treat the King’s officers?”

“I crave your mercy,” replied the host. “I am sure such worthy cavaliers cannot expect something from nothing; and if I had the superbist larder nobody should be more heartily welcome.”

“Well, well,” cried I impatiently, “no prating, its easy to see what you are aiming at, you do not expect us to pay you. I promise you we shall not quarter on you for nothing; only stir yourself, and let us have the conjuror to supper.”

“’Tis done, senors, ’tis done; I always sup myself with the conjuror. I will endeavour to prevail on him to part with his share. Some of his train have been out to forage, and they never return empty. Meanwhile, senors, what do you say to a manchet, and a bottle of the right Barcelona.”

“Fetch it, quickly,” said Fernando, and the host instantly disappeared. We had scarcely entered into the question we proposed to put to the conjuror, when the host returned with wine, and holding it up to the light,

“By the mass,” said he, “but this is the right sort, as clear as fountain water, and as strong as aqua vitæ. I never uncork a bottle of this, but when some of his Majesty’s officers honour me with a call. I’ll be your taster if you please.”

We were entertained with his humour, so different from the stiff and grave manner of Castilians, and we diverted ourselves with inquiring about his neighbours, and listening to have a dozen tales of village scandal. “Now, this,” said he, taking his glass very familiarly, “is what I like: this tells me, senors, that you have seen the world—so have I, for that matter. The other day, there came here a gruff old Don, proud as a bashaw, and grim as a starving wolf. Marching here and there, and saying nothing to nobody, he looked for all the world like a man going to be hanged. His servants, indeed, told me, that he goes once a year to Grenada, to do penance for his sins. Sure enough, he looked like a murderer.”

“A murderer!” repeated Fernando; “Did you say he was a murderer!”

“No, Cavalier,” replied the host, “I said he looked like one, (and I have seen murderers in Italy;) but a man is not always to be taken by his looks: or else, senor, under favor, we should some of us be in as bad a case as Don Grim.”

“You make very free with your guest, I think,” said I.

“Not more so than I wish them to be with me,” replied he. “Why now, senors, can you guess why I took up an inn, and left my dear little native village, in France, where I used to cut hair, and shorten beards? It was because I loved freedom and

variety of character. An inn is more free than a palace; you do as you please, come when you choose, and go when you fancy. You meet all characters on a level; wit has liberty to shew itself, and modesty loses its shame."

"So, indeed, it appears," cried Fernando with impatience, "if thou ever hadst any shame, recal a little of it now, and leave us."

"There is a true shame and a false shame," continued he coolly: "the true shame is—"

"Cease this impertinence," cried I; "go, and hasten our supper."

"It will be ready before you think of it," said he. "Talking beguiles the time, and in an inn a man has a right to say what he pleases. An inn the centre of mirth, jollity and good living. Etiquette is left at the door; and so, senors, let us finish this bottle. Ho! ho! by St. Christoval, here comes his high mightiness, first physician to the Emperor of China, corn-cutter to the Cham of Tartary, and paier of nails to the Great Mogul."

We could not avoid laughing at the humour of our host; but the doctor coming in, we prepared seriously for supper, which was not bad of the kind. Our host's wine contributed to raise our spirits, and he began to rally the doctor on his occult pretensions.

"I beg," said he, after we had supped, "that you will now put me to the proof. I have heard all your doubts, and will now endeavour to remove them. In the first place, let us have three candles." When the host quitted the room to order the lights, "Send that man away," said the doctor. "I will amuse him with some common fancies, and then you may get rid of him."

"What is your name?" inquired Fernando. "It is Almonsor, and my native country is Arabia, where the only pure knowledge of the Caballa is to be acquired. You have said, that magic being contrary to the general laws of nature, it is incredible and impossible; but remember that every accident is a species of magic, with the cause of which we are unacquainted. Were I to take some grains of gunpowder, and kindle them before a company of rude Indians, would they not suppose me a companion of the infernal spirit. So when we rise to the higher system of the Caballa, or combination of natural principles, the mass of mankind stands upon the level of savages."

"Nothing can be fairer," said I; "but here comes De Tormes." The candles being brought, Almonsor amused us with several very curious experiments. In particular, he took from his travelling trunk a crystal bason, and placing it upon the table between three candles, ranged in equal angles,

he poured into a large phial of a mixed liquor, which separated in the bason into different strata, the lowermost taking the appearance of granite, above that gravel, and then clay, next slime, and on the surface water. Into this he poured an elixir, and a metallic tree began to arise, expanding gradually into branches, leaves, and flowers. A few drops from a third phial caused the blossoms to fall, the leaves to wither, and the trunk to become in appearance dead.

All this, though curious, seemed within the limits of human comprehension; but it considerably raised our opinion of his ability, and having dismissed the host, we began to question him upon his powers of prescience.

"I would wish," said I, "to know what shall happen to me within the next three months?"

"You will learn," said he gravely, after a few moments pause, "news which you do not wish, and you will receive that which all men desire."

"And I," said Fernando; "what will happen to me?"

"Shew me the the palm of your left-hand. You will travel long before you find rest. You will be in danger of perishing by violence, which if you escape you may live to old age."

"But of what sort will be that violence?"

"By the sword," replied Almonzor, "You have some secret which now employs your thoughts—beware of the consequences."

"Here," said Fernando, "here is a picture; can you tell me if that lady lives!"

Almonzor took the picture, and for some moments gazed upon it with silent surprise. "Where," cried he at length, "where did you meet this?" Then starting up, he exclaimed wildly, and with a look of horror, "Cold, cold are now those lips that once swelled as the rose of the spring, and opened as the flower to receive the morning dew. This polished forehead is no longer smooth, Time has printed his fingers upon it. Those eyes, clear as the living lustres of the heavens, are now dim as the star of twilight through the vapours of the evening. These cheeks, blooming with the health of perfect youth, are pale, and hollow, and wan. Oh, Time! savage and remorseless monster! what has thou left of all that was lovely. The daughter of health, of beauty, of excellence, gone. Fresh victims feed thy pride and thy power. Oh, children of a moment; what are ye? Visions of the twilight, whither go ye?"

While he uttered these words, he strode about the room, with marks of phrensy in his eye; he paused, stamping with great

agitation; he put his hand to his head in agony, and suddenly laying the picture on the table, darted out of the room.

“What say you to this man?” inquired I; “do you think him most knave or fool?”

“I think it is very extraordinary,” replied Fernando. “His knowledge is wonderful. Has he not told us what will happen? Did he not guess my secret?”

“And who could not, my friend?” returned I. “It is plain, at first sight of your countenance, that something preys upon your mind. There is no hazard in that conjecture; and as to his predictions, I will interpret them. I am to receive news I do not wish, and to gain that which all men desire. In the first place I do not wish to hear the death of any of my relations, yet in so large a family, it may be a great chance if I do not, or how many things are there we do not wish to hear. Then, what does a soldier desire more than honour? and what is more likely than that I shall receive it, after a successful campaign.”

“But then,” said Fernando, “how does he know that I am to travel?”

“Why are you not travelling now? Are soldiers ever at rest! He has had the goodness to tell you, you are in danger of violence. I hope, when you are in a field of battle, you do not expect to die in your bed? and after you escape all these dangers (mark his sagacity) you may live to be old.”

“But this picture,” said my friend—“what horrors spread over the face when he saw it, and how could he tell whether the original were living or dead.”

“You observed, when he took the picture how minutely he examined it? From the workmanship, the manner of the colouring, and the fashion, he could guess the time it was first painted: the rest was all grimace and stage-trick to astonish the senses, and awaken superstition.”

The host here made his appearance, and informed us, that the first physician in the world was suddenly taken ill, and had retired to rest. “And so will we,” replied I: “I see he is master of his trade.”

In the morning, on inquiring for Almonzor, we learn that he had departed by break of day; a circumstance that staggered even Fernando, who began to feel the absurdity of cherishing an inclination for a person perhaps mouldered into dust.

We continued our route till we arrived at Tolosa; where we were to remain for farther orders. We had made a long day's march through a barren country, where the heat had much incommoded us, rendering rest very desirable: the duties of our office were therefore no sooner over, and supper finished, than we re-

tired to our chamber. Our accommodation being here on a large scale, we preferred separate beds; and I indulged myself with the prospect of a night's repose, which rarely falls to a soldier on a march.

Fernando prevented my sleeping by frequently exclaiming, "What is it that oppresses my spirits? I am certain, Albert, some misfortune hangs over me." Twice he awoke me as I was sinking to sleep, with inquiries if I was well; and expressions of fear that some accident was about to befall us. I was by no means pleased with these interruptions, which to me seemed the offspring of superstition, in a mind that had given way to melancholy forebodings, and desired he would suffer me to sleep.

About the middle of the night, I was alarmed by a considerable pressure upon my breast, which was so heavy that I could scarcely breathe. On opening my eyes, I perceived, by the light of a lamp which burned in a room, the figure of a man leaning over me, with his left hand upon my breast.

"Marquis of Denia," said he, "rise."

"I am not the Marquis de Denia," said I, "my father is yet alive." "He is dead!" said the person. "Rise! rise immediately, and make no noise."

I was astonished, as you may believe, at this address from a person I had never seen before; and though I was considerably alarmed for my own safety, I began to address the stranger sitting down by the bedside. "What is it you want," said I, "at this singular hour?"—"Not more singular," he replied, "than the business upon which I am come. Hasten, Marquis—time wears apace—follow me."

"Follow you," repeated I, "to where? May I not awaken my friend?"—"No," replied he; "look at me, and obey me."

I started with an unknown sensation, when I distinguished by the dim twinkling lamp, that he was dressed as a common soldier—his eyes looked wildly upon me, and his countenance was the countenance of death. The story of my friend rushed upon me with conviction. "This," thought I, "is the being whom he met in the defile; he announces my father's death, but wherefore does he visit me." I felt the dreadful necessity of obeying him, and followed his motions in silence.

I observed that his steps admitted no sound; and my terror increased when I beheld the doors open before us, and close at the waving of his hand. "What does this mean?" thought I; "am I to give credit to my senses, or do I dream?"

He led the way without speaking or looking round, till we passed the town, and crossed the bridge at the end of it. I then ventured to inquire where I was to go? and to what purpose?

"Marquis of Denia, follow me!" was the only answer I re-

ceived; and that in a tone of voice so unusual, that I had not sufficient courage to reply.

We passed across several bye paths, and over several bridges, till I became so tired I knew not how to proceed. We at length entered a thicket that spread along the banks of a river; and after some time came to an high embankment, which was covered with thick and almost impenetrable trees, hanging over the stream, whose cheerless waves emitted a melancholy sound beneath us. No path seemed to lead from this dismal situation, total darkness hung round us, and we stood upon the brink of a precipice. I started at my situation. I had hitherto obeyed implicitly the motions of this strange phantom, and I recoiled at remembering the tales of my childhood, which here seemed realized in my present uncertain situation, where death seemed to await me, and no human help was nigh. The magnitude of my danger aroused my resolution:—"I will go no further," cried I, "your purpose may surely be as well answered here as at a mile distance. Speak! tell me what you want?"

Do you mark this place?" said he, "time and you shall bear witness. Fernando Coello is your friend; he is mine—he has given his word.—Attend me!"

He motioned to a thicker part of the forest; my feet seemed to move against my will; and about fifty paces led to a small circle of trees, thickly surrounded by underwood. As well as I could perceive through the gloom, it appeared one of those close recesses, where robbers might safely lurk to fall upon the lonely traveller. I had acquired greater courage from the success of my last address. I paused again, and turned round to this mysterious being. "For what have you led me here?" demanded I, in a firm voice.

"Ascend that tree, Marquis," pointing with his hand; "hide yourself amidst the foilage; wait for an hour; but, as you value your life, be silent."

"Ridiculous!" said I, "what am I to see there?"

"Are you not already satisfied," said he sternly, "that my words are no jest? Touch me, and know whether the grave can lie."

I stretched out my hand to his, but no ice could have been colder. I shrunk back unable to reply. He pointed in silence to the tree; and, after such conviction, I could not disobey. I looked down when I had reached the first boughs, where the leaves were sufficiently thick to conceal me, but he was gone; and I remained some time in a confusion of mind easily accounted for. I became accustomed to my situation; reflecting on the little foresight we possess, with all our boasted sagacity. Should I have considered the man as insane, who should have whispered

me, when I was retiring to rest at Tolosa, that I should pass part of that night in a tree in a forest I knew not where. How many times have we experienced similar circumstances, and yet we boast of our knowledge.

I had continued at my post about half an hour, when I heard voices advancing. Two men approached, and sat down on the grass beneath me. Their voices were harsh and severe, but the darkness did not allow me to distinguish more. I remained in silence, as I had been cautioned, scarcely daring to think, lest I should betray my situation. One of them, with a rapier, examined the bushes; while the other, taking a dark lantern from beneath his black cloak, placed it upon the grass, and spreading a coarse cloth, opened a goat-skin bag, from which he took some pieces of cheese, and bread, and garlic. The other, being satisfied no person was concealed, sat down with his comrade, and began eagerly to eat.

"These are hard times, Lopez," said he; "this is not the fare we used to have in former days, when our services were wanted."

"By the holy virgin!" replied Lopez, "he shall repent it; his borrowed honours shall be taken away; the secret we know shall blast him to the centre. The Moorish castle——"

"Aye, Lopez, that castle might tell a tale; but that is in our own breast, and the very wind shall not hear it till the proper time. Were my suspicions certain; by the blasting lightning, I would make them swallow my rapier!"

"I have my doubts upon that business, Jacques; for I heard two voices, or I would then have been satisfied. You know I am no coward, but that chamber unmanned me."

"Had I been there," said Jacques, "my nerves would not have been so weak, I would have told a better tale: but you was startled at the tempest of the night, and let two simple travellers carry away the only positive proof we could bring. That dagger would of itself have confounded him; and we might have lived like princes."

I began to suspect that this Lopez had been the man whom we had heard cross the chamber of the Moorish tower, and I confess I began to tremble at my situation. I listened, scarcely daring to breathe, to the discourse of these wretches, whose horrid features were but partially visible by the dim light of the lantern which burnt between them. They continued to eat and discourse, mingling their words with execrations and oaths.

"The old Don is not returned," said Lopez; "he pays a regular visit to that ruin. Does he go to examine the wreck he has made; or to *visit the dead*?"

"Think'st thou, Lopez, that blood hurts his conscience? no,

no, he sleeps tranquil upon a bed of carnage—no ghosts trouble his slumbers; but we shall start upon him more fearfully than the grave—we shall demand a recompense for our services that will not be easily satisfied. He thought we were secure when the Turks took the galley.”

“And yet, Jacques,” replied Loquez, “I have heard another story. Every peasant can tell you the moroseness of his behaviour—savage to his daughters, and a tyrant to his servants. Something they say he has seen, and I know not—”



“Away with this folly!” cried Jacques, “by St. Peter! Lopez, you become an old woman!—You will be useless in the profession, if you lend your ear to all the babbling tales of these idiots.—Seen! ha! ha!”

“You are merry, comrade,” replied Lopez; “we have no aqua vitæ, or I might bear you company, but I have not forgot that night—fearful indeed it was, and near this place too!—I shall never forget how he struggled—”

“At it again!” cried Jacques.—“Aye, aye,” said Lopez, “you may jest, Jacques; pity never entered your composition. Indeed, for that matter, I have not much to spare; but, by the Holy Virgin! I felt some repugnance—the wind whistled about us, and the rain fell. He little dreamed of the journey he was going to take!”

“ I love not these stories,” said Jacques, in a gruff voice ; many a man sets out on a journey, that never comes back again. It seems he has got rid of his second wife as easy as the first ! On my soul, I wish we could accommodote matters with him ; he is such a true son of the blade, that my heart feels a friendship for him. Nobody should have served him truer, if he had not so meanly stopped our salary. That galls me, and he shall repent it.

“ That he shall,” cried Lopez : “ but you remember the hint that I dropped you the other day ; if we could bring that to bear, our fortunes would be no more out at the elbows. I have seen the ladies, they are delicate creatures, and no doubt old Don Padilla will comply to save his neck.”

“ I know but one objection,” said Jacques ; “ his nephew has not long been of age—he is only the male heir, and must be first put out of the way. Fernando,” replied Lopez, in a low voice, “ is now at Tolosa—we will—”

My rage and horror at these words overcame my reason, and prevented my listening further to a plan which raised me almost to madness. “ Villains ! Murderers !” exclaimed I. “ We are betrayed !” cried Lopez, shutting the lantern, “ who can have overheard us ? but death shall close his mouth from telling tales.”

One of them immediately fired a pistol into the tree, the ball of which rushed amongst the leaves without hitting me, it being totally dark. I was aware of the extent of my imprudence, but it was now too late to regret, and leaping from the tree, sword in hand, the force of my weight brought one of them to the ground, and my sword pierced him through the heart. It was so firmly fixed, passing through him into the earth, that I endeavoured in vain to withdraw it, and I lay upon him at the mercy of his comrade, who instantly struck at me with a dagger, wounding me severely in the arm. In the dark he could not distinguish me from his companion, and repeating his blow, he buried it in the body of his friend : swearing he had now done my business ; but to make sure, he lifted the pistol he had discharged, and, with a blow, deprived me of sense.

CHAPTER IV.

This bears the mark of more than mortal means.

WHEN I recovered, I found that it was morning. I attempted to rise, but was so weak with loss of blood, that it was with extreme pain and difficulty I crept away from the body of the assassin, which was clotted with gore.

I sat down on a bank, where I was so much overcome with faintness, that I expected every moment to breathe my last. While I sat thus, with the horrid object of the dead body before me, I reflected upon the death of my father, which, after what had happened, I could no longer doubt; and the awful manner in which I had received the information, added to the melancholy tidings.

No person approached, and my voice was too feeble to be heard. I looked round, but the place was wild, and without any path that I could distinguish. In this situation I gave myself up to the expectation of death; and I cannot say I felt the regret which might have been expected in one so young, and with so many prospects of future pleasures.

“At most,” thought I, “a very few years would have deprived this body of its vigour, and reduced it to its present imbecility—my senses would have gradually decayed—my years would have fled by as moments—and my place would, in a very short time, have been no longer known amongst the living. Fearful and tremendous moment! inconceivable change. But this present moment and my body is animated with various sensations, my mind is endowed with the powers of reflection; yet how soon, and I shall be like that body before me, a mass of inert and unconscious matter!”

From these meditations I fell into a reverie, from which I was roused by a slight rustle of the branches, and raising my eyes, I perceived something moving along the thicket. I elevated my voice as loud as possible, but my efforts were too feeble to be heard, and I resigned myself again to my fate. A moment after a little dog came barking into the copse, followed by two ladies, who were led by his clamours.

At sight of the dismal scene which presented to their eyes, they uttered a loud cry of horror ; one of them appeared nearly fainting, leaning upon her companion for support, which delayed their flight, and gave me time to arrest their attention.

“ Ladies,” said I, “ take some compassion upon a wounded stranger. If it is in your power send me some assistance, or I shall perish.”

“ Holy Mother !” said one of them, drawing her companion nearer, “ what a sight is this ! How came you in this terrible situation ? And who is that person before you drenched in blood ?”

“ That, lady,” replied I, “ is a robber. Two of them fell upon me—the one you see lies there, and the other has escaped.”

“ Is he near this place ?” said the other lady, looking round with fearful eye and a changing countenance. “ Let us hasten, Virginia, to send some assistance. Whence come you, Cavalier ?”

“ I am an officer,” replied I, “ I came from Tolosa, where I have a friend, if you will have the goodness to send for him.

“ It is fifteen miles from here to Tolosa, and you must have assistance sooner,” answered the lady.

“ I am certain,” returned I, “ that I walked from Tolosa to this place in half an hour.”

“ Poor Cavalier !” said Virginia, “ let us make haste, Elmira—he is already light-headed, and may die before we can get any assistance.”

They hastened away, leaving me not knowing what to think, or how it was possible that I could have walked so great a distance in so short a time, unless my senses had been under some powerful delusion.

In about a quarter of an hour they returned with several servants, who made a litter of boughs, upon which I was placed, after taking a cordial from the fair hands of Virginia ; who seemed to take particular interest in my situation, and charmed me with the sympathising tenderness of her disposition.

With some difficulty the servants carried me amongst the low underwood of the thicket, which spread and extended into a forest ; in the midst of which we arrived at a large gothic building of considerable magnificence. Its gloomy turrets frowned over the waving landscape, and seemed to nod defiance to the black mountains of Sierra Morena, which arose behind it.

A chamber was allotted me by the ladies, under the direction of a silver-headed domestic ; and a servant dispatched to Tolosa

to inform my friend of the accident, and to bring a surgeon to my assistance.

In the mean time I felt myself considerably relieved, from the prospect I had of tranquillity, and the nourishment I had taken. I inquired of the servant that attended me, who was the owner of the castle, and what was its name.

"It is called," answered he, "the Castle of Montillo, and the name of his Excellenza is Don Tevarro Padilla?"

"Don Padilla!" repeated I, in surprise; "is this the castle of Don Padilla?"

"Do you doubt it?" said the servant. "What is there wonderful in that?"

"O nothing! I only thought it strange that I should have rambled so far. Is Don Padilla at home?"

"No," answered he: "he is gone to take his usual journey to Grenada. Perhaps you might not have been so welcome had he been here."

"Why so, friend? How soon do you expect him?"

"He usually stays a month; and now he has been gone a fortnight."

"I suppose these ladies are his daughters?—they are very fine women."

"Aye, aye, Cavalier," returned he, with a broad grin, "'tis a pity you could not get here without this ugly adventure; I warrant we should have had fine sport now if Excellenza is away. I'm sure the castle is more like a dungeon than any thing else eleven months in the year."

"I suppose you have not many balls and feasts when he is present?" said I, "I understand he is very melancholy." This I had gathered from the description I had of him by our Host De Tormes; and I made no doubt but this was the man the villains had mentioned. To my interrogation the servant replied:

"Melancholy, Cavalier! why he's worse than melancholy, he's stark mad at times! then woe to poor Miguel if he comes in the way! And as to dances, and these sort of things, why we never dare move a foot about the house, but as if we were walking to a funeral; unless when his Excellenza wants any thing, and then we must fly, quick, flash, like lightning, at the turn of his hand. Then if he was to see any of us laugh, he flies into such a plaguy passion, you would think we had robbed him?"

"But can you give no account for this disposition; it surely cannot be natural?"

"In my opinion it is the most unnatural humour in the world; but I believe its this old gloomy dungeon of a place.—Do you

know it puts me quite in the horrors myself ; I ain't like the same as I was when I first came here. Then there are such stories about its dark and winding stairs and passages, empty chambers, gloomy dungeons, and terrible phantoms, that it would make your hair stand an end to hear them. There's old Gonzalez knows a pretty many of them ; but he's a close dog, hum's and ha's for an hour, and then ends with a shrug and a nod."

I inquired if he had ever seen any of those phantoms he mentioned ? he replied,

"I can't say that I have ; but I have heard groans enough to curdle the blood in my veins. Then they say that the clashing of swords, and shivering of armour may be frequently heard in the east side of the castle, which has been shut up this twenty years, and not a soul is allowed to enter any of the chambers ; though for that, I believe, if the doors were set wide open, nobody would have the least curiosity, unless it were the ladies. They, to be sure, have once or twice asked the keys of his Excellenza, but they might as well have asked for his whiskers !"

"Is Don Padilla married ?" enquired I.

"No, no," said Miguel, "he has been twice married already ; but for that matter he wanted to be so a third time, but Donna Isabella did not like to venture, after what happened to his former wives."

"What did happen, Miguel ?" said I, "is not death a common accident ?"

"Yes, yes ; but then the manner is sometimes different. Now, for my part, I should like to die in my bed ; and you, as a soldier, would like to die in a battle, or so—"

"Not altogether," replied I, smiling ; "but what was there particular in the death of Padilla's wives ?"

"Nay, Cavalier, I did not say there was any thing particular—report is never to be believed—or else to be sure if one was to believe report, things were bad enough. But I do not like talking ; and to say truth, if what I have already said were to come to his Excellenza's ears, I must troop from the castle. Nobody knows for certain, unless it is old Gonzalez ; and he's almost as silent as my lord. He'll sit for whole hours, and say nothing to any mother's soul of us. I would give any thing to know as much as he knows."

I began to be tired with the loquacity of Miguel, who seemed willing to tell every thing which I had no wish to hear ; and finding an inclination to sleep, I desired he would do as he had intimated, and leave me.

It was some hours before I awoke ; when I found myself considerably revived, and the confusion of my head tranquillized.

On opening my eyes, I beheld my friend Fernando sitting by me—his countenance pale as death. He would not suffer me to be awakened on his arrival; judging well, that rest was as necessary to me as medicine.

The surgeon then came in, and having examined my wound, assured me that in a very few days I might leave my chamber.

“I am very glad of it,” said Fernando, “as his presence at Madrid will be necessary as soon as possible.”

“What business requires me there?” said I; “have you heard then?”—“Heard what?” demanded he, with an inquiring look. “Have you received any news from Madrid?”

“Ah! my dear friend,” answered I, “you have received an account of my father’s death, and fear to alarm me by an hasty disclosure; but it was known to me some hours since.”

“You surprise me,” said he: “the courier arrived at Tolosa but a moment before we come from thence—I dismounted to break open the packet. When I arrived here, I found you asleep, and was told you had been so near two hours; how then is it possible you could have received these tidings?”

“I knew it last night at Tolosa,” replied I; “but at a more convenient opportunity I will explain.” He immediately comprehended me, and remained silent.

In the evening I found myself so much recovered, that I desired Fernando would come and sit with me; and, under pretence of family concerns, we admitted no visitor. I then explained to him the strange circumstances of the preceding night, which increased his melancholy air.

“This, my dear Albert,” said he, “is no common business; but why you and I should be selected as instruments, confounds me. ’Tis true, that this Don Padilla is an uncle of mine, he was my mother’s brother, and if his daughter die without issue, I am his sole heir. I have also a dormant claim upon this very estate; but, as I never heard that my family had received any particular injury from him, I did not wish to enter into any process, which would appear as unnatural on my part. His first wife died suddenly when I was very young—I believe it was from a surfeit at a feast; and then he married again in a shorter time than was decent.”

“Do you remember the name of the first lady?” inquired I.

“Her name was Elmira: if I remember right, she was daughter to the then governor of Lima.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed I, “are you certain, my friend, in what you say? If so, she was my mother’s sister. A sister whom she has long lamented as swallowed up in an earthquake, with her husband, after herself, who was the elder sister, returned to

Spain, and was married to the marquis, my father. But how could she have remained unknown in Spain?"

"That is very easily accounted for," answered Fernando. "Don Padilla never leaves this retreat. My mother was his sister. My father died a few months after his marriage, and my mother at the hour which gave me birth. Thus I was left to the protection of guardians; and was educated at the castle of the Marquis de los Velos, to whose interest, before his death, I owed the commission I now enjoy, till I shall be of age to claim my father's property. My information relative to Don Padilla is vague. I know only that a little after his sister's death, after having run through his fortune, he went abroad an extravagant spendthrift. In our western colonies he contrived to repair his fortune, by means which are unknown; and when he returned, he disclaimed all connection with his relations, from motives of resentment at their formal refusal to supply his extravagance, and from that moroseness of disposition, which, I am informed, renders his life a burden to himself. He has two daughters, I was told, very fine women; but, 'till this day, I had never the pleasure of seeing them."

I inquired, who was the lady he had made his second wife?

"He married a lady from Grenada, about the time of Philip's persecution of the Moors," replied he; "but of her I know no more, than that she died in less than a twelvemonth, leaving a daughter, the lady Elmira."

"What you have informed me," said I, "opens upon me new scenes. Were you not very much frightened at my singular absence?"

"I had more reason to be frightened than you may imagine," said he. "You know what strange forebodings hung upon my mind; and when I did sleep, it was oppressive and heavy. Images of unconnected forms filled my mind, and harassed my imagination. Methought that the figure of the wounded soldier stood over me, with anger in his countenance, and I heard him pronounce my name. I fancied that I awoke, and he stood beside me."

"'Fernando,' said he, 'what regard do you pay to your promises! My service never interrupts your occupations. Rise! rise! your friend is far hence! If he falls, revenge him, for he is in my service. Behold me! mark me! know me!' cried he in a louder voice; and throwing open his soldier's dress, I beheld beneath it a Moorish robe, stained with blood, which appeared even then to trickle down from several wounds. I turned away my eyes with horror, and was so much agitated, that I awoke in reality from this double dream; and, starting from my bed, went immediately to awaken you. My agitation and terror was ex-

treme when I found you absent. Then all the warning of the phantom of my mind arose into reality; I believed that you were certainly murdered; and I uttered a cry of despair, which alarmed the house.

“After searching every part of the inn, I dispatched several messengers round the town and its environs with very little hope: for it appeared to me above comprehension, that you should have left your room, and the inn, and yet all the doors remain fastened. From my anxiety I was relieved by the arrival of your messenger. I think, however, we may both learn that some event of strange incident hangs over us.”

“That admits of no doubt,” replied I; “it is not for trifles the usual order of nature is interrupted. If I were superstitious I might now fancy Almonser to be a magician; but, as I said



before, any man might make the same guesses, with the same certainty of truth—this however is very different. The spirit of the dead, for important reasons may be permitted to appear; but no man can be supposed to have power to call up an evil spirit, or the soul of a departed human being at his pleasure, to satisfy an idle and impious curiosity: as little probable is it, that any finite creature can be master of future events.”

“I am of your opinion,” replied he. “but what am I to do?—Am I to charge Padilla with the murder of I know not who?—How am I to bring proof of such a charge?”

"We must wait," answered I. "Singular events have brought us to this castle, at a time when admission was alone possible: for I am informed, that his jealousy or his conscience prevents him ever opening his gates to a stranger. I have been told, very strange reports are circulated about the next range of apartments, at present I am not fully informed; but if possible we will examine that side of the building. I am now considerably interested; as well as from the adventure of the assassins, as by what I have now learnt from yourself, regarding my mother's sister.

"The attention that I received from my friend, and the fair sisters, in a few days restored me so far as to be able to walk about my chamber; but though the wounds of my body were amended, I found that my heart had received an impression not so easily to be remedied; though I concealed from Virginia that I was the son of her mother's sister.

"My friend encouraged me to hope, by repeating to me many little things Virginia had said in my favour to her sister and himself: 'And,' added he, laughing, 'I believe I have made some progress in the affection of my cousin Elmira.'"

"I congratulate you," said I; "that will be acting like a man—She is a little better than a picture."

"I allow her merit," answered he; "but fancy you know is every thing with a lover; and I do not believe I shall ever sincerely love, till I find a lady resembling this charming picture."

At these words he took it from his bosom, where it always hung, and gazed upon it with pleasure. "There is certainly some little likeness," said he, "in the general outline, between this and my cousin Elmira; but then she is by no means so finished a creature."

While he was thus speaking, old Gonzalez had entered the room without our noticing him; his eye glancing upon the picture, he smiled; and putting back his white locks, "Ah, Cavalier," said he, "you are an happy man, you wear your mistress in your bosom: will you favour an old man with the sight of a young beauty? I have seen many a fair flower bloom and wither: I am now withered myself for that matter, but yet it pleases me to see a pretty face."

"Look upon this then," said Fernando, "and tell me if you ever saw a prettier." The old man then took the portrait in his hand, and gazing upon it, stood motionless, while the tears trickled from his eyes in large drops.

"Why is this?" said Fernando, somewhat surprised. "Why do you weep, my friend?"

"Forgive me," answered he; "forgive an old man who is

full of fanciful conceits : that picture brought former times to my recollection, days long ago gone away."

"But what circumstance does this picture recal, Gonzalez, that you weep? Does it remind you of any one you knew?"

"Ah, Cavalier!" said he, shaking his head, "I could shew you a picture exactly like it in the picture gallery; it was accounted an admirable likeness of my late mistress, the mother of Lady Elmira, but it is somewhat older than this portrait represents. Is this lady alive, Senor?"

Fernando, who was sinking fast into reflection was aroused at this question, which he did not expect.

"I know not," replied he, "whether she is or no; but could you not oblige me by shewing me the picture gallery?—You have raised my curiosity: for you know we are always interested by trifles, if they relate to ourselves."

Gonzalez looked at Fernando, repeating, "by trifles, Senor!"

"Yes, trifles," answered Fernando: "do you consider it a great favour to shew me these pictures?"

"Aye, that was not what we were saying," replied Gonzalez.

"Well, well," said Fernando, "never mind what we were saying; will you lead me thither now, we shall have sufficient time before the sun sets.—I never did see my aunt living, and now I should wish to see her resemblance."

"Your aunt!" repeated Gonzalez, in apparent surprise; "was Lady Zidana your aunt? Holy Fathers! is this possible?"

"I assure you I speak truth," replied Fernando. "Did you not know that I am of the family of the Coello's, and that Don Padilla was—"

"Yes, yes, now I remember," answered he; "but it is very singular.—If you will follow me, Senor, and make but little noise, we will go by the back passages. Servants are so curious, and so fond of the marvellous, that any thing in a large gothic building like this excites their wonder."

I would willingly have accompanied them, but I feared too much exertion; and I doubted not but my friend might gain more information alone—this cautious domestic not being easily induced to general confidence.

After traversing several dark and winding passages, they entered a large room very elegantly furnished in the old Spanish style. Antique tapestry covered the walls, along which ranged a number of whole length pictures of generations long since mouldered into dust. At the upper end of the gallery appeared two large gilt frames, and, in place of painting, a curtain of black silk hung down, exactly covering the canvass.

"There," said Gonzalez, "are the pictures of his Ex-

cellenza's two wives. He never can bear to look upon them since they are dead; and, to prevent his *feelings* being shocked, he has thus hung them in mourning.—Shall I draw the veil, Senor? This is the Lady Emira, Don Padilla's first wife—she is a very fine person—she died very young, Senor.”

“That remark,” said Fernando, “reminds me also, that she died suddenly.—You knew her, Gonzalez?”

The old man replied, “she did die suddenly, Senor, very suddenly. I was not then at the castle—I have, however, been informed, that she died by a surfeit at a feast.”

“That was a common report, you know whether it was true?”

“And why should you doubt it, Senor?”

“I have my reasons, Gonzalez—they are buried here,” (laying his hand upon his bosom.) “You know I am Don Padilla's nephew, the Marquis de Denia is nephew to this lady—can you suppose ours an idle curiosity?”

“Ah, Senor,” replied Gonzalez, mournfully, “we must not trust our senses in this world—I hear, and see, and am silent. Of things which we cannot prove, 'tis best to hear, and see, and say nothing.”

“But many incidents, which singly are nothing,” said Fernando, “added together, may bring a volume of proof—proof deep and irresistible!”

“Then eternal truth will appear, and the injured receive atonement,” said Gonzalez.

“And murderers,” cried Fernando, “receive the reward of their black malignity.”

“Do you know then,” said Gonzalez, looking round him with fearful apprehension; “do you know then, Senor, any thing that can lead you to such a suspicion?—We have got upon a very strange subject.”

“I have reason: the reports that I have heard relating to the eastern part of this building—the strange melancholy of Don Padilla—this dagger,” cried he, taking from his dress the dagger he had found in the Moorish ruin, and presenting its rusty point to Gonzalez, who started back affrighted at the sight.

“Ah! Fernando!” said he, “where did you meet that weapon? the enchasure of gold down the blade is remarkable; it was brought from New Spain.”

“I understand you,” replied Fernando, admiring the discretion of this old man. “This dagger was wrapped in a Moorish habit, stained with blood: now dare you trust me, when you have this dreadful credential of confidence?”

“What am I to say? Of the death of Lady Emira I know

nothing positive. At that time I lived with my lady Zidana in Grenada. I had a sister named Teresa, who lived in this castle, and was waiting-maid to Lady Emira. Don Padilla never treated this lady, since their return from New Spain, with that kindness her goodness deserved : he was always pretending to be jealous of her, though Heaven knows how unjustly ! for she never set her foot out of the castle from the first day she entered it ; except perhaps a little walk in the woods.

“ You may easily suppose, Senor, what sort of a life this was for a young and beautiful lady to lead ; and had it not been for the playfulness of her little infant Virginia, it would have been sad indeed.”

Fernando ventured to remind him, that he was now straying from the point.

“ You are right,” said he. “ I might dwell for days on these subjects, if I gave loose to the inclinations of my tongue. The jealousies of Don Padilla became every day more insupportable ; and his threats to confine her wholly in the castle rendered her life very unhappy. About this time the persecutions of Philip broke out, and he was frequently absent for weeks, nobody knew whither. He arrived suddenly one night at the castle in better spirits than usual ; and surprised my lady, with requesting she would order a little entertainment, as he intended supping with her that night. They supped by themselves, attended only by my sister Teresa. Lady Emira was in excellent spirits, and Don Padilla in seeming good humour.—Seeming, I call it, because I cannot think these sudden changes natural :—we do not change from bad to good in an hour, Senor.”

“ Very well, go on,” said Fernando, impatiently.

“ After supper my lady was suddenly taken ill ; Don Padilla would have it, she had overforced her appetite—but whatever it was, she died the same night.—Listen, Senor ! did you hear any noise ?”

“ No,” answered Fernando ; “ what should we hear ?”

“ I know not,” said Gonzalez, listening ; “ but for some time after the ladies’ death, there were noises, very strange, and very unaccountable heard.”

“ Did no suspicion arise, at the sudden death of Emira ?” said Fernando : “ did it create no inquiry ?”

“ This part of Spain was at that time all in alarm ; most men had sufficient business of their own to attend. But you shall hear :—Lady Emira was laid out on a bed of state ; I could shew it you now if I had the keys of those chambers. Several of the neighbouring people were invited to see her, and Don Padilla made them remark, that she was very little changed

by death; but this did not silence all suspicion. My sister nearly broke her heart lamenting for her mistress, and was with difficulty kept from constantly remaining in the room till the day of the funeral. The corpse was removed into another chamber, where it lay in state, and Padilla took the key of the chambers where his lady had before resided into his own possession, and would not permit a thing to be touched. On the fourth day in the evening, the coffin was screwed down, in presence of all the domestics; who, with tears in their eyes took a last look at their mistress. It was interred in the dusk of the evening, in the chapel vaults belonging to the castle, and Don Padilla retired to his own apartments in visible agitation of mind.

“Old Pedro, who was then steward, and had a great affection for his lady, took it into his head that she was not dead, and that Don Padilla had only buried her with a sleeping potion; for which purpose he watched for three successive nights at the entrance of the chapel; but all remained uninterrupted, and he was satisfied of the certainty of his lady's death. But now, Senor, I am to relate to you a circumstance to me unaccountable, and which I fear will never be explained till the day, when many a foul secret will come to light. My sister, Teresa, who was inconsolable for the loss of her mistress, could not rest in one place, but wandered from room to room as if in search of something she had lost. She had put little Virginia to bed after the funeral, and stole towards the apartments of her late lady. She knew that Don Padilla was in his own room, and she ventured from curiosity perhaps, to try the outer door. It opened, and she entered the rooms, where every thing remained as she had left it.

“The desolate air of the deserted chambers inspired her with a superstitious fear. The sun had been some time gone down, and every object was indistinctly seen, so that she almost trembled as she stepped over the floors; and would have returned had not some unknown impulse urged her on. At last she came to the little bed-chamber, where Elmira used to sleep in the absence of her husband. The door stood ajar, and she ventured to push it open, when she beheld the figure of her late mistress kneeling at the foot of a little table, on which was placed a crucifix. Her lips seemed to move, and her features were paler than death. Teresa stood motionless at the sight, and had neither power to speak or move; when she was suddenly grasped by some person behind her, and fell senseless on the ground.

“This person was Don Padilla; who carried her himself into the great hall, and commanded the servants to put her to bed. On her recovery she found herself in her own room, with me

sitting beside her; for I had that very evening arrived at the castle to take her back to Greneda. When she recovered her senses, she informed me of these incidents: but the last appeared to me so strange, that I knew not what to think; especially when I considered the uncertainty of twilight, and the disturbed mind of Teresa."

"She must certainly have been deceived," said Fernando; "it could not be her mistress—and it was a singular posture for a ghost."

"I know not," replied Gonzalez, "my mind is bewildered with the circumstance; for from that night to this I have never seen my sister."

"You dream surely," cried Fernando; "it was not your sister, but lady Emira who died."

"I am well aware of that," replied he. "After what Teresa had told me, I left her, to make some inquiries amongst the servants. She slept alone; and in the morning her room was found empty; and no account could be learnt of her from that hour to this."

"That is singular indeed," said Fernando, fixing his eyes steadily upon Gonzalez; "what do you suspect?"

"Ah, Senor," said he, shaking his head, "what can one suspect in such a case? She must have been spirited away by Don Padilla, to prevent her telling secrets he had no mind should be known."

"But what secrets could she tell?—She did not know that her lady was poisoned.—You say, she saw her buried with her own eyes—and, to say the truth, in this instance I am apt to think her imagination deceived her."

"It might be so," said the old man, with a doubting air; "but her absence is no deception." However, let us now look at the second picture, before the sun is wholly lost behind the black waving forest. There, Fernando, there is a charming creature!"

"Charming indeed!" cried Fernando, starting back with surprise; "'tis the very exact resemblance of this portrait—what an heavenly countenance! This lady was your mistress, I think? Did she live long with Padilla?"

"Only two years, Senor; she was then lost to us."

"Lost to you! is she not dead?"

"I fear she is," replied Gonzalez, putting his hand to his eyes; "but in what way nobody knows."

"She did not die of a surfeit? You know her story, do you not?" said Fernando: "I have particular reasons to wish for some information, as this picture I wear may inform you. Come to the chamber where my friend the Marquis de Denia is

confined; on the word of a Spaniard you may depend on our honour."

"I will attend at twelve," replied Gonzalez, "the servants will then be at rest."

Fernando after gazing some time upon the picture of Lady Zidana, which the rays of the setting sun gilded and enlivened; returned to inform me of this long conversation, and to advance a thousand suspicions. The sudden loss of Teresa, and in so particular a manner, seemed to stamp guilt upon the death of Emira; but it was without trace, and affording no clue to conviction—served only to stimulate our interest.

We were interrupted by a gentle strain of sweet music, which stole upon the evening breeze. Fernando opened the casement, which overlooked the gardens of the castle, now overshadowed by twilight. We listened to the music which came upon the wind, and were charmed with the tender expression of the composition, which was a Spanish love song. When the music ceased, we felt disappointed, waiting at the window for a returning sound. We did not judge wrong in supposing it to be the ladies, who had entertained themselves with this innocent amusement, in the pleasant shades of the gardens: and we soon after saw them appear, the one with a lute, the other with a bandola.

We saluted them from the window, and they returned the compliment; though it was too late to see their features distinctly.

This little incident served to make them the subject of our discourse: and the difference of their manners from those of their father, while they had his example before them, and felt the influence of his power, drew forth our praise.

CHAPTER V.

.....,..... Oh! mischief thou art quick
To enter into the thoughts of desperate man.

AT the appointed time we heard a rap at our door, and opening it, old Gonzalez entered, looking round him with caution. Having closed the door, "I have brought us a bottle of wine," said he; "it will be a refreshment, and help our spirits at this solemn hour, when the inhabitants of the grave are abroad."

We each took a glass, and being seated, requested him to inform us what he knew of Lady Zidana.

"She is, or was," said he, "as you may judge by the name, of Moorish lineage; but her ancestors having frequently intermarried with the natives of Spain, the flatness of the Moresco features is done away. She was married very early in life to Count Ferandez, by whom she had a daughter. She lived with her lord in the greatest harmony, at their castle upon the banks of the Darro."

"I believe," remarked Fernando, interrupting him, and looking towards me, "that castle is now in ruins?"

"Alas! Senors," replied the old man, "well I know it—and Don Padilla knows it. It was, twenty years ago, the most magnificent in the country. Some of the great rooms were built of marble; and the fountains of water cooled the heat of the air. Don Padilla had known my lord the Count Ferandez early in life; for at that time Count Ferandez was as gay and as extravagant as himself.



"At the first visit Don Padilla made to our castle, he saw and admired my lady. I had my eyes upon him, and was not long in discovering the attention he paid her; but whether my lady gave him a dismissal in private or he acted from deeper policy I know not, but we had little of his company till the edict of Philip destroyed at once all the connections of families and friends. All the Moorish families were at once reduced to beg-

gary and exile. Nothing but the most dreadful distress was to be seen. Count Ferendez assembled his dependents, with intent to resist the army of the court; but his incapacity of means was every hour more visible; and certain and dreadful destruction hung over him and his household. He would not change his religion, as several persons of rank were ready to do, and he awaited with resignation the threatening storm.

"While things were in this state, Don Padilla arrived at midnight, with two soldiers his only attendants. He was a long time closeted with the Count, and I could gather no more of their conversation than by the effects which followed. Count Ferendez the same night set out for the castle of Montillo, carrying with him 'a number of jewels, and disguising himself under the dress of one of the soldiers; both of them accompanying him as a guard.'"

Fernando groaned at this observation, but remained silent: Gonzalez continued,

"I understood that Padilla had offered him the asylum of this castle till he might procure a purchaser for his estates, or join his brothers in Africa: while my Lady Zidana, and her little daughter, should remain at a secret residence in Grenada, till she could conveniently follow. Be this as it would, my unfortunate master never reached this castle. He was murdered, barbarously murdered on the road; but whether by an accidental encounter with some straggling party of soldiers, or whether——"

The clock struck twelve, and Gonzalez paused to dry a tear from his cheek, and compose the perturbation of his mind.

"What you have told us," said I, "is strange; it forms a ground for terrible suspicions. Did you see those soldiers to whose care Don Padilla delivered your master?"

"Not fully," replied Gonzalez. "They were introduced in so cautious a manner, that I caught but a faint glance as they passed; but I have since thought, they had more the appearance of assassins, than of regular soldiers."

"Have these men ever appeared since?" inquired Fernando.

"Never, Senor, to my knowledge," replied he. "It was said they had never been found any more than my lord."

"That is most strange!" said I. "What proof then have you beyond suspicion? or how came this to your knowledge without some witness?"

"It was not in the nature of things, that my master should forsake his wife and daughter. He departed at the dead of the night. He has never been seen since. But the soldier's dress he had on was found in the wood near this castle, torn and bloody. What greater proofs are needful?"

He had scarcely pronounced the last word, when we were all

startled by the great clock again striking twelve. "What can this mean?" said Fernando, turning pale.

"Ah, Senor," replied Gonzalez calmly, "that is a supernatural intimation—these omens are frequent—they stir up recollection, and prevent black actions from slipping over the memory. I have things to relate yet more terrible, and more strange, than a warning like this."

"Go on then," said I; and he thus continued:

"Don Padilla conveyed my lady and her daughter to Grenada, where he left them; and, giving me directions to secure the most valuable moveables, and bring them to my master at his castle—I obeyed. On my arrival at this place, judge, Senora, my surprise; it was then that I learnt all at once the death of Lady Elmira.—The murder of my master, and the loss of my sister quickly followed. It was with difficulty I supported myself under so much distress: and had not my mind been hardened by the examples of equal misery which every hour crowded upon me, I should certainly have sunk beneath it.

"My suspicions were great and strong; but prudence locked them in my own bosom. I watched the dark looks of Padilla and thought I could read the fate of my master in his countenance: but such a suspicion I dared not breathe to myself.

"The old steward, Pedro, was a man who had caught much of his master's gloom, and I suspected knew some of his secrets, which determined me to guard my expressions. I had not been many days in the castle, when passing one evening along a dusky gallery, I heard the sound of voices as in anger. I listened, and could distinguish the tones of supplication, and the threats of a person in rage: but the subject I could not at all hear—a word or two being all I could learn in a sentence: from which I judged, that the supplicating person had made some discovery which was of importance. In about half an hour they parted; and I concealed myself in a dark corner, that I might not be seen. Pedro came out, his lips pale, his knees trembling, and his eyes staring wildly: he passed on with a quick and hasty step, as if he was pursued by some frightful apparition.

"He had not reached the end of the gallery, when Padilla came out. This was the first time I had ever seen him enraged, and gloomy as was my situation, his frightful frown and glowing eyes struck me with terror. "Pedro!" cried he, in a voice of thunder; at which the unhappy wretch started nearly to falling. "Pedro, come here!—were you in Peru, villain, I would grind you into powder!—obey my words. This is the last night you remain in these walls. I shall send a *guide* with you to your relations in Murcia. Haste, and never appear before my sight—

unless you would that I should strike you dead at my feet !” Pedro threw himself upon the ground, and entreated forgiveness. “ If,” said he, “ I may be pardoned, never shall my lips—”

“ No,” cried Padilla, changing countenance ; “ *never shall thy lips betray me.* —Do you know me ? If you do, arise and prepare to be gone.” With these words, he strode back to the room, the door of which he jarred to, with a force which resounded along the gallery.

“ Pedro appeared confounded with terror. I dared not quit my station ; as I knew not the consequences that might ensue from a discovery of my having been witness to such a scene, in a castle where violence seemed to reign. Pedro withdrew in disorder, and I quitted my station with caution.

“ I had various conjectures in my own mind on this occasion ; and I partly imputed the rage of Don Padilla to the suspicions Pedro had expressed in watching at the entrance into the chapel.—Be that as it would, Pedro left the castle the same night.”

“ How do you know he *left it* ?” said Fernando.

“ Because he was not to be found the next morning.”

“ That might be,” replied Fernando, with a groan. “ Merciful Heaven ! what thoughts crowd upon me !——Proceed.”

“ That next morning Don Padilla called me to his room. “ You were a faithful servant, Gonzalez, to my lost friend,” said he ; “ you shall not suffer by his unfortunate death, if you will serve me as you did him. My old steward, Pedro, left me last night to retire into Murcia amongst his relations.”

“ His relations !” muttered I, before I recollected myself.

“ Aye, his relations,” repeated he in a lofty voice, and eyeing me with a keen look. “ Don’t you think, honest Gonzalez, ’tis a comfortable thing to retire in your old age amongst your friends ? If you serve me faithfully I will provide for you in the same way.”

“ I said nothing, except observing that I did not consider myself as discharged from my duty to my lady.”

“ Nor I either,” replied he, with a grim smile. “ The fine castle, Gonzalez, is buried in ruins by the king’s troops ; your lady is coming to live in my castle, and I will protect her with my life.”

“ And her little daughter, your Excellenza ?”

“ Yes, Yes, both : I am the protector of all related to my unfortunate friend the Count. Hear me, Gonzalez ! I am in two days going to Grenada, I shall bring your lady hither, and give you in charge to see the chambers of my late wife prepared and decorated—You are, from this time, my steward in place of Pedro.”

“It was with a heavy heart I entered on this office ; not a little perplexed in my own mind with the direction I had received, to fit up the Lady Elmira’s rooms : but yet I had no idea that Padilla would ever prevail on my mistress to marry him. He however knew too well the power he now possessed ; and, as I have learnt, he mingled threats with persuasion ; and, moved at length by the picture he drew of her own poverty, and the misery she would entail upon her little daughter, he prevailed upon her to give a reluctant consent. I received this tidings with sorrow ; being obliged to prepare for the solemnization of this unhallowed marriage at this Castle of Montillo.

“In about a week my lady arrived : the deepest melancholy was fixed upon her countenance ; and it was easy to see that grief lay heavy at her heart. She retired with her daughter to the apartments prepared, and shutting herself in, gave way to grief. Pity was all I had to bestow, as I had not even an opportunity of speaking.

“Don Padilla hastened the preparations : and, to cover a bad action by a blaze of splendor, invited many of the neighbouring nobility to be present at his nuptials.

“The long gallery was filled with musicians, and the company were invited to dance, before the supper should be served. Lady Zidana was dressed in white, with a plume of black feathers, as a tribute to her late lord. She resisted all the invitations of Don Padilla to dance ; who, to say the truth, exerted himself in every point to please her, and drive from her features that grief, which in spite of her efforts was but too visible.

“The dances occupied the evening, and it was almost twelve o’clock before the company assembled in the large gothic hall to supper. Several musicians were placed there upon a temporary stage, and such of us who could be spared from attending the company, contrived to witness this elegant assemblage of all that seemed beautiful, rich, and grand. The number of officers dressed in their uniforms, and mingled with the variegated company, added much to the sight. They took their seats amidst universal mirth, and a general good humour prevailed.—Little did they think in what way it was to be interrupted !

“The tables were heaped with the choicest viands ; and wine of different sorts stood in goblets for the accommodation of the guests. The music played in lively strains, echoing through the lofty fretwork of the gothic hall ; and nothing seemed capable of interrupting the general festivity—when the great clock of the castle struck one.

“At that moment a fearful cry was heard, as if resounding from every part of the castle, and pervading every ear with indescribable fear.—It seemed like the cry of murder, mingling

with an eastern blast. The company all started, and gazed upon each other in silent consternation. The tapers which blazed upon the tables, and in branches along the walls, suddenly expired : and, from a scene of brightness and splendor, arose the deepest darkness and distress. The music suddenly ceased—the company rose in dismay, crowding through the avenues leading from the hall in the greatest distress, several of the ladies fainting with affright.

“It was impossible to distinguish persons in this general confusion, and I concealed myself in the tapestry hangings in the first motions of fear. In a very few minutes no person remained in the banquetting hall, except Don Padilla, his new married lady and myself. The mingling sounds of the flying company were subsided into a death-like silence, and the tapers as suddenly re-lighted as they had been extinguished ; but now a more terrible object presented to our eyes.

“The figure of the murdered Count Ferendez stood at the head of the table, facing Lady Zidana and Padilla ; he was clothed in the dress of a soldier, as he had quitted his castle ; he cast around him a glance of fierce inquiry, darting as a sun-beam. My lady immediately fainted ; and the bloodless cheeks of Padilla, betrayed his fear.

“The spectre gazed upon him a few moments. “Knowest thou me ?” said he, in a hollow voice. Padilla’s lips trembled, but he returned no answer. “See,” said the spectre, “the work of thine hand !—but how long shall these actions prosper ?”

“It was not I.—My hand never raised itself against you,” faltered Padilla.

The spectre frowned. “Can you deceive me now ?” said he. “Do I not know thy thoughts and thy actions.—But thy time is not yet—”

“Padilla seemed to recover at these words. “Away !” cried he, with rising firmness, “thy threats and thyself are as shades !”

“The spectre raised his hand in a threatening posture—the same fearful cry sounded through the hall—the lamps were extinguished for a moment, and again re-lighted without hands.

“The mixture of passion expressed on the brow of Padilla, made me tremble as I stood. He sat leaning his chin upon the palms of his hands, gazing upon the place where the spectre had been, as though he was yet before him ; while Lady Zidana lay upon the ground unnoticed, and the feast remained on the tables unregarded.

“I wished to retreat, for I was sick with various emotions, but I trembled at being discovered. Don Padilla, after musing some time, suddenly started up, and pouring out a large goblet

full of aqua vitæ, drank it off. It was now I endeavoured to get away; but his alarm had given quickness to his hearing, he started, and turned suddenly round perceived me stealing along the side of the hall—

“Ha!” cried he, drawing his sword, “thou art no shade—but I will quickly make thee such!” He darted upon me, and dragging me by the throat along the ground to the table, lifted his sword to strike—”

Here the old man paused, and looked round, as if apprehensive that Don Padilla was yet standing over him. The castle bell at that period tolled—one. I shuddered at the melancholy sound, which was lengthened through the hollow apartments, and seemed to realize the dreadful scenes Gonzalez had impressed upon our minds.

For some time an awful silence prevailed, apprehension marked our features, and, taking each a glass of wine, Gonzalez continued.

“When Padilla perceived that it was I, he quitted his grasp, still holding his glittering sword to my throat.

“Gonzalez,” said he, “is it you?—Pedro was *dismissed* my service for a smaller crime.—But, by my soul! I swear, that a second shall be the forfeit of your life. Is it for such base wretches as thou art, to pry into the secrets of a man like me? Hear me, villain! this is the term on which I now let thee live—conceal what thou hast seen in thy inmost soul—dare not to whisper it to thyself. If I ever learn that thou dost, that day shall be to thee black with vengeance!”

“Nor shalt thou escape!” said a voice; at which we all arose in confusion and amazement.

“What can this mean?” cried Gonzalez trembling; “who can have overheard us?”

“It is some servant,” said Fernando, “whose idle curiosity has led them hither.”

He did not wait for more words, but leaping forward, he hastily opened the door, and ran along the corridor; but he could distinguish no one, nor hear any retreating footstep. “This is truly astonishing,” said he, returning. “Had any person been there, I must have heard them.”

“What chambers are adjoining to these?” said I; “possibly some person is concealed in them?”

“No, no,” replied the old man, very much agitated. “Beyond that wall, where the picture of the black and white knights is hung, are the ranges of the eastern wing, it is impossible any person could have entered there; and on the other side, are the chambers of this suite; leading to which they must pass your apartment.”

I endeavoured to impute the voice we had heard to our own heated imagination ; though at the same time I did not conceive how it was possible the same delusion should deceive us all. It was with difficulty we prevailed on the old man to proceed—pausing every sentence to listen.

“ After this terrible threat, Don Padilla commanded me to assist him in carrying his new bride to her chamber ; swearing, that all the fiends in hell should not deprive him of his prize, much less the perturbed spirit of a man murdered by robbers. I would have interposed with an observation, that my lady was in no fit state to become a bridal chamber ; and that I doubted much if she ever recovered.

“ Fool ! driveling idiot ! ” cried he, knitting his brows, “ I ask thee not advice—living or dead, all the fiends in hell shall not deprive me of her ! ”

“ Such, Senors, was the marriage of Lady Zidana, whose picture Fernando wears. From that hour she never recovered her spirits ; and Don Padilla, after the birth of Lady Elmira, became disgusted at her reserve, and evidently hated her more than he had ever loved her.”

“ What became of the daughter of Count Ferendez ? ” said Fernando.

“ Don Padilla, after a very little time, found means to place her out at Grenada, and, till my lady’s death, it was believed she was well provided for ; but since then, I have never heard other than an uncertain report of her death ; but how, heaven alone can tell, or Don Padilla.”

“ Ha ! I am certain I heard a noise,” cried Fernando.

“ Thou shalt not go unrewarded ! ” said the voice we had before heard, and which threw us into the greatest consternation.

We sought in vain to discover the mystery ; sounding the walls to see where they were hollow, and examining every place where concealment was possible. There remained no longer a doubt but we had been observed and overheard, and that by an enemy ; but who it could possibly be we had no means to discover.

Gonzalez was very much affected, and we had much difficulty to tranquillise his terror by assurances of our protection, let what would happen.

“ I have,” said he, “ this consolation, that my intentions are just ; and I will trust that heaven will not suffer the guilty always to triumph.”

“ You are very right,” replied I, “ virtue, and a right intention, will preserve us tranquil amidst danger ; nor will Providence fail to bring vengeance on the guilty. Go now to rest, my good Gonzalez, your years require the nourishment of sleep ;

we are young, and inured to hardship, we will watch—and, if this intruder dares to appear, he will find that though weak, I have yet a soldier's arm !”

“ Yes, yes,” said Fernando, “ an arm that has already dispatched one murderer to his grave, and, I trust, would not fail in combating another.”

After Gonzalez had retired, we spent several hours in reflecting and conversing on the singular and almost incredible events we had heard.



It appeared clear, that Don Padilla had been an actor in the tragedy of Count Ferendez ; it was credible that passion might instigate him to the murder of his friend ; but here were others, which arose in strange and fearful array. The death of Elmira appeared more than suspicious—the sudden disappearance of Pedro and Teresa was equally unaccountable. His cruelty to Lady Zidana and her daughter, of whose fate we were ignorant, raised our detestation. But, though we could easily allow for any extravagance of human passion, our belief was staggered, and our senses confounded, when the wandering spirit of Count Ferendez crossed our thoughts ; and we should have treated the whole as a chimera, had not our own experience staggered all the effects of a liberal education.

Fernando remained with me during the night, but it passed without interruption. On the following day the body of the rufian Lopez was buried on the spot where he had fallen ; he having been for several days exposed to the view of visitants, that he might be claimed if known, but no owner could be discovered, nor any news learnt of his companion ; who had made good his retreat so secretly, that from the imperfect description I could give, no information could be gathered.

CHAPTER VI.

'Tis gone.

'Twas but my fancy, or perhaps the wind
Forcing his entrance thro' some hollow cavern.
No matter what—I feel my eyes grow weary.

SHAKESPEARE.

ON the fifth day of my residence in the castle of Montillo, I found myself so much recovered, that I ventured in the evening to walk in the garden, accompanied by Fernando and the ladies.

They seemed to take pleasure in leading us over this elegant little place, where a variety of exotic plants, with flowers from Peru and Mexico, flourished as in their native climes. Aromatic shrubs from Arabia were planted in *parterres*, and filled the air with the most delightful perfume: a clear and winding rill watered the groves; inviting to repose by its murmuring sound, and tempting the feet to rove amidst the freshness of evergreens. At the end of a grove of orange and citron trees, was a small arbour, formed of marble pillars, clear and beautiful as the Pærean stone; between these was a curious lattice work of gilt canes, which admitted at once the air and the light.

Roses and jessamines were entwined in the net work; and Persian geraniums, which yield a musky scent, crept along the base.

In a beautiful arbour were several fine paintings on fanciful subjects; and cushions of crimson velvet invited to repose.

“It is here,” said Elmira, “that my sister and I often pass the evening. How do you approve of our taste, cavaliers?”

“Nothing,” replied I, “can be more charming!” On the right we see only objects of beauty, flowers interspersed with fruits and shrubs: on the left the mountains of Morena rear

up their frowning heads; and the turrets of the castle gloom over the deep forest. Before us runs the limpid brook, babbling over pebbles it has polished to brightness.

Elmira then played us the Evening Hymn, while I sat with Virginia, leaning against the lattice frame, and reflecting on the probability, that not many days would part us, and that I knew not if we should ever meet again. I sighed deeply at this reflection. Virginia looked upon me with an expression that penetrated my heart, and spoke more than many sentences.

“Ah, my fair cousin,” said I, taking her hand, when her sister had ceased to play; “what a delicious scene would this be, if it were not transitory. My soul feels itself, and would willingly remain here, but how soon must it tear itself away!”

“And must you *soon* leave us?” said she, with a half-suppressed sigh. “Yes,” replied I; “I am not ignorant, Virginia, of your father’s disposition— it will be impossible we should remain after his arrival.”

“Most true,” returned she, looking down. “My father will be very angry that you were ever admitted; but he did not see you pale, bleeding, and wounded, or his heart might have pitied you.”

“And did your heart then pity me, Virginia?” said I, with a feeling I had never before experienced, and which now I cannot define. I felt her hand flutter as I held it, but she returned me no answer; and in that moment I formed the determination of making her my wife.

Elmira endeavoured, by a thousand little arts, to engage Fernando in particular conversation; but he had too much experience of the world, not to perceive her partiality, and too much honour to encourage, what he had no inclination to return. The charms he had painted in possessing an original, such as the miniature of Lady Zidana, rendered all other insipid: though he would, at times, join with me in ridiculing such a fancy. Beside, there appeared in his eyes, too much of Don Padilla in the features of Elmira. But I see, my dear marquis, I must be delicate in this point; and perhaps it is well for you both, Fernando did not see with your eyes.

I endeavoured during this conversation to strike out some means of corresponding with Virginia when I should be in Madrid; but none appeared possible, unless through the hands of Gonzalez, and I much doubted whether he would venture. It was easy to perceive, that the interruption of the last night had sat heavy on his mind; and he no doubt reproached himself with having inadvertently betrayed a secret which for so many years he had carefully guarded, and which, if known, would expose him to

the worst vengeance of his master. I did not dare mention these suggestions to Virginia, much less the secret that related to her father: for though both sisters wondered and lamented at his melancholy and morose disposition, they were far from entertaining any of those suspicions, which in our eyes appeared certainties.

It was almost dark before we could think of returning to the castle. Whilst we remained at supper, some dispatches arrived from Tolosa, relative to the troops, which I gave Fernando instructions how to answer; and a private letter from my mother, which I retired to my chamber to read.

It contained a long detail of my father's sufferings during his last illness, his frequent wishes for my presence, and many family particulars, which required my speedy return to Madrid.

I became quite melancholy at the sorrowful sentiments it contained; and my mind giving itself up to a long series of thinking, I found my spirits become so dejected, that I knew not how to account for it.

Undoubtedly this imbecility of mind was principally occasioned by love. I know of no passion that more relaxes the mind, its chief pleasure consists in solitude and contemplation: to this I might add, my mother's letter, which so unmanned me, that a thousand fancies floated in my brain.

The moon slowly advanced over the dark waving forest, and shed its beams through my casement. I arose from my chair to meditate on the solemn view, when nature enjoyed repose. The dark scenery, which in one huge mass extended before the window, spread over me a sensation of awe, and for a time I remained struck with the sublimity of my imagination. A faint and distant light aroused my attention; it moved slowly amongst the trees, and seemed to approach the castle.

I fancied I could perceive the figure of a man, whose ghastly features were shaded into horror by the dim light which he carried. He bent beneath a load, which seemed to own the human form; and the thought crossed my mind, that it might possibly be the assassin Jacques, carrying away the dead body of his comrade, when he could venture with safety to tear it from the ground.

Something of fear crept over me at the remembrance of that eventful night, when I had so strangely received warning of my father's death, and so nearly received my own. I could not wholly avoid apprehension at the distant sight of a man, whose dealings in blood I had so much reason to know: and I watched his motions with anxiety. The distance deprived me of certainty, and I lost him in an angle of the garden wall, along which he seemed to have taken his course.

I was greatly disturbed at this incident, as I knew not but I might run some danger from the revenge of this villain, who could not be ignorant of my residence in the castle. I leaned upon the casement of the window, revolving a thousand ideas: by degrees my mind assumed its tone, from reflecting, that the same power which had hitherto, might continue to protect me.

The gentle sighs of the wind, which scarce waved the tops of the trees, seemed to whisper sad sounds; and I enjoyed in ecstasy the pleasing sensations that crept over me. "Now," thought I, "if some heavenly choristers were to tune their instruments, and in sweet hymning warble some celestial song, could the abodes of Paradise furnish a more pleasing pleasure?"

I listened, as if expecting some strain would reach me on the breeze—but the wind came, and sighing passed away. A few stars glittered in the firmament, and I gazed upon them with awful satisfaction. "How magnificent is all this!" said I to myself; "worlds roll upon worlds, and harmony guides their course!—What then is man, little and insignificant man, amidst all the grandeur of creation?"

My heart became heavy at this reflection. I withdrew from the window, and sat down upon a chair, leaning with my arms upon a table—every noise in the castle was hushed into silence. I remained fixed in my situation, having no inclination to sleep, and enjoying the sadness that hung in clouds over me—when the clock struck twelve; reverberating with solemn sounds through the castle.

It reminded me of the eventful incidents Gonzalez had repeated, and I looked round with a sort of expectation, that some fearful form would start upon me through the duskiness of my chamber; for I had no other light than the rays of the moon, which scarcely rendered objects visible.

A partial ray fell upon an old picture, which hung on the side of the room that faced me. It was an ancient battle piece; in which a tournament was exhibited before a lady, who stood by herself, in the gallery of an interior court, the sole witness and arbiter of merit. The knights were one of them in black, the other in white armour. The black knight had driven his lance into the body of his opponent, and the blood trickled down the side of the white horse, on which the white knight rode. The light of the moon but faintly shewed the colouring; and I remained leaning on the table, with my eyes steadily fixed upon the body of the falling knight.

While I thus continued to gaze, I fancied that the canvass moved, and that the wounded knight retreated backwards from the black knight, who pressed upon him.

The white knight continued slowly to retreat, and the black

knight moved some paces backwards, as to give velocity to his next onset. The delusion of my imagination was such, that I did not perceive that the whole canvass slid back, parting in the centre, till my eyes were struck with the figure of a man standing in the vacancy. He looked into the chamber with caution ; while his murderous countenance gleamed with a smile of malice, highly raised by the red glare of a lamp he held in his left hand, his right containing a poniard, on which my fancy (in the moment) observed marks of blood.

My hair almost stood erect on my head, and my blood ran chill to my heart, as I gazed upon the horrid spectre, without power to move, or to determine whether it were human, or no.

He looked into my chamber with an inquiring eye, and particularly towards the bed ; which, standing at the opposite end of the room, prevented his perceiving me, as I sat in the shade. Hearing no sound, and not seeing my lamp burning, he ventured slowly to step out into the room, the opening reaching within two feet of the floor. He advanced with a slow pace towards the bed, pausing to listen, the dagger raised in his hand. He stood over the bed a minute, while a ghastly grin of satisfaction spread over his livid features, his eyes sparkled, and he raised his arm to plunge the poniard into his fancied victim—”

I now clearly understood this was no incorporeal spectre. I was so overcome with the sense of the unexpected danger I had so narrowly escaped, that I groaned aloud, and starting up with sudden animation, I rushed forward, drawing my sword in an instant. Had I proceeded with more caution, I might have laid him dead at my feet without his having any power to assault me, he being only armed with a short poinard. Alarmed by the noise I made, his countenance changed, and starting round, he beheld my glittering sword within a yard of his throat.

He gave a sudden and masterly spring to one side, by which he avoided the sweep of my weapon ; nor did he stay to hazard a second stroke, leaping through the aperture, where he narrowly missed being cut in two, the point of my sword dividing the leathern belt he had round him.

I did not hesitate about following him through the private passage, along which he ran with surprising swiftness, continuing to carry the lamp. Notwithstanding my arm was not yet perfectly recovered, I sensibly gained upon him, and should have overtaken him had he not extinguished the lamp, involving the narrow passage in total darkness.

I had now every thing to fear, if at that moment I could have been capable of any fear ; because nothing was more easy than for this assassin to wait his opportunity in the dark.

I listened to mark which way his footsteps tended, still following, my sword extended at arm's length, and parrying from side to side, that he might not slip me, and cut off my retreat.

I continued to follow till I found myself in a large hall, where the moon-beams faintly shone upon the ponderous furniture, without serving to distinguish particular objects, the window being of stained glass.

I now paused; for I had lost the sound of his footsteps, and I fancied that the villain had sheltered himself in some corner, or behind the furniture, and might dart upon me, without my having power to ward the unseen stroke of death.

This hall was at a considerable distance from my chamber; and now, when the ardour of the chase was over, I felt the full danger of my situation, exposed in a place of which I was wholly ignorant, and having near me a man who had the darkest intentions, and scrupled not at the means of executing them. I wondered that he had not used fire-arms, which he was probably only prevented from by the apprehension of raising the servants.

I shuddered at retracing the bewildered labyrinth I had just trodden; and it was almost equally dangerous to remain where I was. From this remote situation it was impossible to alarm the people of the castle, and I stood for some time in a gloomy suspense.

At length reflecting, that though the moon at present glimmered through the windows and prevented total darkness, it would in a short time sink from that side of the building, and leave me exposed to dangers I should have no means to repel.

I turned round to seek the passage to my own chamber, when I fancied I could distinguish the obscure figure of the man stealing along the wall. I started forward, but he eluded my blow, and fled again through an opposite door. I had no doubt that I should now overtake him; and I continued to pursue till his footsteps were again lost, no longer echoing through the winding passages.

No pale beam of light shone upon the darkness around me, and I turned to retrace my way with caution, every step expecting to meet the point of his dagger; nothing being more easy than for him to fall upon me by surprise.

I had no means to distinguish whether the way I took was right; and, after winding about through several chambers, in place of returning to the great hall, I found myself at the top of a staircase, which, by the faint light of the moon, I did not remember ever to have seen. I made no doubt but I was now on the eastern side of the castle, from whence it would be impossible to return by any of the great galleries, the terminating doors being always locked. I had now bewildered myself so much,

that I had lost the clue to those secret ways by which I had entered.

Under these circumstances it became indifferent which way I should proceed, and I descended the stairs. I then found myself upon the ground floor, which, as well as I could distinguish, was paved with marble. The moon had passed to the other side of the horizon, and left this part of the castle in darkness. I went on, and found several doors leading into suites of chambers, all of which were fastened.

About half way along the passage, I found one which stood half open. Without reflecting that it could not possibly lead me to the inhabited part of the castle, I ventured in, but was soon stopped by an opposite door, the key of which was in the lock. I opened it, the hinges grating harshly with the rust they had gathered, and so damp a vapour issued forth, that I remained some minutes before I durst venture to enter. I then found myself in a small chamber, the walls of which I could reach round with my sword extended. I moved slowly forward, and entered another room, which was much larger, and led into a fourth room, the opposite door of which was locked, and, like the second, the key remained.

I judged from the length of these rooms that I had crossed the base of the eastern wing, and that this door would lead me into the gardens. This circumstance caused me to pause, from a certain reflection which occurred, that the assassin who had entered my chamber, was no other than Jacques ; and that through these doors and chambers he had found admission to the castle, locking them after him.

I was pleased with this idea, and resolving to quit this wing of the building, and secure the entrance, I turned the key and opened the door, when I found myself in another room, instead of the garden I had expected ; but this disappointment at that time was absorbed in a greater and more terrible feeling.

The moon-beams shone full through the opposite window, reflecting on the objects before me. I fixed my eyes for a moment on the most horrible sight I had ever beheld—a sight which chilled the circling blood in my veins, and overspread my soul with horror.

I recoiled suddenly back, and drawing the door firmly too, with an impulse of terror, it closed with a thundering sound, that echoed hollow, and ran along the whole pile of building.

I stood some time in the most cruel agony of suspense ; when reasoning myself into better judgment, I endeavoured again to open the door, that I might be certain what I had seen was no delusion, and that my mind might not remain with an image upon it, of what was most terrible and detestable in human nature.

All my efforts were in vain, the door was firmly fastened, and a loud cry within but too surely convinced me that I had witnessed no illusion.

I returned with an uneven step to the long passage in front of these chambers. The variety of exertion I had undergone rendered me extremely weary, and the horrific object which my eyes had beheld, exhausted my strength so much, that when I had with difficulty ascended half way up the great stairs, I was obliged to sit down, overcome with weakness.

In that situation I resolved to await the return of morning; it being impossible that any one could approach me from above or below, without my hearing the sound of their steps.



I had not sat long before my mind, weary and agitated, sunk into a disturbed and confused sleep. I dreamed, that I was in bed in my own chamber, and that some one pulled me by the arm, so that I awoke, and perceived Virginia smiling upon me. "Follow me, Albert," said she; "my sister has already taken the vows, and I am going to receive the veil, come and be witness to the ceremony."

I thought I started up, very much afflicted at such a summons when I beheld on the other side of me, a person wrapped wholly in long black clothes; so that I could distinguish neither form nor feature, other than that the outline seemed human. I looked

at Virginia, as much as to inquire who it could be? She smiled upon me with ineffable sweetness—"Make no inquiries about him," said she; "follow me! and I charge you, as you value your life and my love, that you do not look behind you."

I fancied that I followed as she directed; but by one of those sudden transitions we experience in dreams, I found myself I knew not how in a church-yard, Virginia still before me. I felt a strong inclination to look round, that I might see if the same dark form followed us, but her words checked me. "This," said she solemnly, "is my grave." On a sudden she began to ascend into the air—I found myself rise I knew not how, but it was without exertion on my part.

Virginia's robes, which were of white, now seemed to unfold and spread upon the air for many yards, and I perceived round her waist a zone of sparkling diamonds. The vast vault of the heavens seemed of a deeper blue, the earth diminished, and the stars increased in brilliance and magnitude, appearing as so many suns.

I felt myself ravished at the beauties that surrounded me: "Surely," thought I, "that dark being cannot have followed us to this admirable place?" Forgetting the injunction I had received, I inadvertently turned round my head, and beheld, with an inexpressible dread which overpowered me, the figure of a skeleton, in appearance glowing like a furnace, with black robes streaming in the wind, and waving round him like clouds.

I found myself falling, and caught hold of Virginia's garments to save me; I dragged her down with myself; but, as we fell, I fancied that she was suddenly changed into Elmira, and tearing her robes from me, she mounted far from my sight. Loud thunders broke round me on every side—the beaming suns became black as night—while I was precipitated thousands of miles to the earth; where I fainted away, and believed myself dead.

When I recovered from this singular dream, which was not for some time after, I actually believed, that what I had experienced was truth. I stretched out my hands, with a doubt of my own existence; my whole body was bedewed with a cold sweat, and opening my eyes, I beheld the day shining around me.

It was some time before I recovered the perfect use of my reason; and then I perceived, that I had in my sleep fallen down the stairs: and I imputed the thunder I had heard, to the noise of my falling, as I rolled from step to step.

My strength was so much exhausted that I could scarcely stand; and I made no doubt, but I had fainted away in my sleep. I was endeavouring to ascend the stairs, when hearing a noise above me, I looked up, and beheld Fernando at the top, whose countenance expressed his wonder and surprise.

He flew towards me, alarmed at my apparent weakness and haggard looks ; and inquiring where I was wounded, began to support me up the stairs.

“ My dear friend,” said I, “ be not apprehensive on that account, I am not otherwise hurt than by excessive fright and fatigue. I have been witness to the most horrible of actions, and dreamed a dream, that has harrowed up my soul, and reduced me to this weakness. —But how came you to follow me hither ?”

“ I went,” said he, “ to your chamber, to invite you to a morning’s walk in the garden; when I was confounded with finding you not in your own room: and, observing the opening made by the removal of the tournament, I immediately concluded that the intruder of the former night had paid you a visit, and that you had detected him. I saw also that you had not been in bed, which told me you must have been long absent, and I began to fear the worst of accidents. I did not remain long considering what I should do—a soldier, you know, must be prompt in decision, and the way was open before me—I took down your pistols, and with one in each hand entered the passage.

I continued along its obscure and narrow windings, till it opened behind a chair of state, whose drapery and hangings concealed the entrance. I then found myself in a large antique hall, the windows of which were of painted glass. In the middle of the hall stood the large tables and seats in confusion—dishes and goblets covered with dust, remained upon the tables, the visible vestiges of a feast—and I cast a suspicious glance around me, at remembering the strange interruption on the wedding night of Don Padilla and Lady Zidana.

“ I pictured to myself the scene of gay festivity, the exultation of Padilla, and the joy of his guests—which in one moment must have been converted into utter dismay; and would have unbent the determinations of any other man. I had not much time to bestow on these meditations, as no sound or trace appeared which could point out the way you had taken. A little door at the opposite end standing open invited me to enter; and, after passing through a variety of chambers, where the old furniture remained covered with cobwebs and dust, I at length reached the head of these stairs, and am rejoiced that my fears are not altogether realised.”

It required almost half an hour to return through the intricate windings, and I found myself too ill at that time to enter upon particular details. We could have but one opinion of the person who had so clandestinely entered my chamber. Nothing was more probable, than that Jacques, who had wounded me in the wood, knew of some secret entrance into that desolate quarter of

the castle, where he might best find retreat from the search made after him ; and prompted by revenge for the death of his comrade, mingled with fear for himself, from what I had overheard, was resolved to destroy me.

We considered whether it would be prudent to mention in the castle what had occurred, and cause that part of the building to be searched : but it struck us, that, strangers as we were, we had no authority for such proceeding ; and it would be needlessly alarming the ladies with dismal apprehensions. We therefore judged it better to remain silent, and provide for any attempt that villainy or malice might suggest against us.

At first we intended imparting to Gonzalez, the real cause of the interruption he had met in his narrative ; but his years had weakened his firmness ; and his fears of Padilla's revenge being ever most strong, we determined to hold him in ignorance, and to watch by ourselves, well armed on the following night.

CHAPTER VII.

O now for ever
Farewell the tranquil mind, farewell content.
SHAKESPEARE.

HAVING taken some refreshment, I laid down to tranquillize the ferment of my spirits, and if possible to forget the terrific object I had seen in the moonlight chamber, as well as the phantoms of my dream which haunted me.

Meanwhile Fernando, after replacing the picture and fastening it, so as it should not be opened without awaking me, went to make my excuses to the ladies, by informing them that the letters I had received from Madrid, had detained me so far in the night, that I found myself not sufficiently well to rise before noon, when, for the first time, I would join them in the family dining room.

I arose much refreshed at noon, and joined this agreeable party ; but I could not at once shake off the disquiet which preyed upon me. The sight of Virginia seemed even to increase it ; as her looks and actions every instant recalled the visions of my slumbers.

The afternoon was passed in little entertainment of music and

singing ; for, notwithstanding the heat of the weather, we were too much satisfied with our society to separate ; and some fragrant fruits presented us by Gonzalez, greatly refreshed us.

Fernando, to be more at ease, had unloosed his waistcoat, and the picture which he always wore, attracted the eye of Elmira.

“Ha ! ha ! Cavalier,” said she, feigning to laugh, “that I suppose is the portrait of some favourite lady ?—Will you permit me to see your chioce ?”

Fernando could not avoid giving the picture into her hands, which she no sooner saw, than she exclaimed—“Holy Virgin ! Senor, how came you to wear the picture of my mother ? Tell me, did you ever see her ?”

To these questions Fernando replied, “That he knew not till lately the resemblance, and merely wore it by way of ornament ; that he never had had the happiness of seeing the lady her mother : and, that he wondered how she herself should know the likeness, since, to the best of his recollection, she was an infant when her mother died.”

“That is very true,” replied she, with a sigh. “Though children of different mothers, neither of us ever knew the blessings of maternal affection : indeed, so obscure is the death of these dear relations, that we know little more of them than their pictures inform us. You shall visit our gallery of family paintings, and then you shall compare the likenesses : but I must confess, a miniature softens down the countenance, and makes the face appear handsomer.”

“This lady is exquisitely handsome,” answered Fernando ; “what think you, cousin ? (turning to Virginia.) See how admirably the Moorish habit becomes her ?—In my opinion, were she no relation of mine, the painting merits preservation.”

“Come sister,” said Elmira, “let us shew the Cavaliers the pictures ; I know they will be entertained.”

“But do you not remember,” said Virginia, “that our father has forbid us to go there without him ?—When he returns the Cavaliers can attend him, and he can give them the whole history.”

“But *would* he give us the history ?” cried Fernando, his eyes sparkling with meaning. “Think you that he—”

I interrupted him, by expressing a wish to see these pictures, which I had not done before, and to prevent the ladies from observing any singularity in my friend’s meaning. I observed, that perhaps Don Padilla was so choice of them, that he feared they might be injured if visited in his absence.

I saw that Virginia wavered in her own mind—wishing to oblige us, and yet fearing to disobey her father : but the argu-

ments of her sister at last overcame her scruples—Gonzalez was sent for to bring the keys.

The old man was not satisfied at the summons, and he ventured to express as much. “You know, my honoured ladies,” said he, “that his Excellenza would be displeased, were he to come to the knowledge of your having broken his orders; and I am sure the Cavaliers (looking at us) would not wish that any words should arise from their curiosity.”

“Nonsense!” replied Elmira; “do you not know that my father is many miles distant? and how should he ever know that we just went into the room, and out again?”

“Ah, Lady!” replied Gonzalez, “many an action much more secret than this, has been published by the winds.”

“Do not let us go, sister; we had better not,” said Virginia.

“Just as you please, my dear,” replied Elmira; “Gonzalez talks as if it was a mighty crime; but, for my part, if the Cavaliers will attend me, I will shew the pictures myself. Give me the keys, Gonzalez; I wonder what harm we shall do to inanimate canvass?”

Fernando and myself made some faint opposition; though we, in fact, could not conceive that any ill could arise from so innocent a cause.

“Well,” said Gonzalez, “if you are determined to go, there are the keys; but you must not insist upon my attendance—I know my duty better.”

As he pronounced the last sentence, he looked towards us with an expression of meaning I could not comprehend; and taking the hand of Virginia, she reluctantly accompanied us to the picture gallery.

Elmira drew up the curtains, and engaged our attention by a comparison of the two pictures. I admired the resemblance Lady Elmira bore to Virginia; and though my friend gave the preference to Lady Zidana, I could not agree with him—she wanting the clear carnated complexion, which I always preferred to a brunette.

We had been about half an hour employed in the gallery, when the door was opened, and Gonzalez entered in haste and perturbation.

“Haste instantly away!” cried he. “Return this moment, I beseech you, to the dining room.”

“But why so much hurry?” said I.

“We are undone?” cried he: “the most unforeseen circumstance?—Hasten away this moment?”

We implicitly obeyed him, though ignorant of his reasons; and, locking the door, he hurried down the back stairs, bidding us not tarry till we got to the dining room.

“What do you think of this interruption?” said I; “what can possibly have thrown the old man into such a tremor?”

“O! I know not,” said Virginia; “but I can scarcely breathe with apprehension,”

Fernando broke out into a laugh. “Ridiculous, my dear cousin!” said he: “why should you be so apprehensive? This old fellow has a mind to punish us for presuming to differ in opinion from himself: depend on it, you will find the whole a trick of his invention.”

“I fear not,” answered Virginia, “Gonzalez is not of a light disposition,—I never knew him jest in my life.”

“Here comes one that does jest,” said Fernando. “Here, Hugo! where are you running in such haste?”

“O, Senors?” cried Hugo, out of breath, “such a surprise!—I am all, as one may say, out of sorts—I should as soon have expected to be hanged!”

“That you are very likely to be,” said Fernando; “but you would not be in such haste to the gallows.—Say then where you were running, and what has happened?”

“I only heard it by the way,” said he; “and ran away directly to tell my fellow servants, who are all at sixes and sevens, and no more expected——”

“Tedious fellow!” cried Fernando, “what is it you are chattering about?—what did you hear?—what did you not expect?”

“Why, I did not expect to meet you in an ill humour, Senor? and what I heard I believe to be true, and that makes me in such haste to repeat it.”

“It is to no purpose,” said I, “that we trifle with this fellow. Hugo knows you are not his master, and he takes liberties.”

“I have no doubt,” answered Fernando, “but my first suspicions were true and this fellow was sent purposely to heighten our apprehension.”

I gave credit for myself this suggestion, and we walked leisurely on, till we came to the dining room. Elmira entered first, but she started back with a scream, and we all pressed forward together to see the object of her dismay. We were struck dumb at sight of Don Padilla, who, by our delay, had had time to enter the dining room before us. He was pacing the room, his brows bent into the severest frown I had ever beheld. You have seen, Marquis, what a gloomy mortal he usually is—but then he looked mischief personified.

Virginia half ran towards him, but he did not deign to notice her; and her courage failing, she was obliged to lean upon my arm to a chair. Elmira was very little better, stammering out something about surprise at his sudden return, which he did not think worthy of answer.

In this unpleasant situation we remained for some minutes. The colour went and came alternately in the cheeks of my friend: and fearing that his feelings might betray him into rashness, I summoned up my resolution, and suppressed my pride at this cavalier treatment.

“Don Padilla,” said I, “you are perhaps as much surprised at finding unexpected visitants in your castle, as these ladies are at your return without notice, that they might have prepared to receive you in a more suitable manner.” Still he remained silent, and I went on. “I can assure you, that this intrusion of ours upon your hospitality, was by no means from a trivial motive; and I should wish—”

He stopped, and stood opposite me, fixing his keen eye upon me, while I continued :

“And I should wish, that the obligation I have received from your family in your absence, may be the means of promoting a more extensive intercourse in future.”

“Who are you?” said he, contemptuously.

“Whoever I am,” replied I, coolly, “give me leave to say, Don Padilla, *I know who you are!*”

A malicious smile bent his features. “You know who I am!” said he : “be so good as to explain who that is.”

I had already condemned myself for my haste; and now replied, with a bow.

“The father of these ladies; and, as such, entitled to my esteem, as I shall for ever remember the infinite debt of gratitude I owe them.”

“So shall I,” replied he, “But who is your comrade?”

Fernando, who had not the same measures to keep as I, and who had listened with a burning spirit to the altercation, replied with a high and stern voice :

“Don Padilla! it is for miscreants, murderers, and assassins to have *comrades*! You ask who I am?—At present I am a stranger; but you *shall* one day know me. The man who could trample upon the claims of friendship, may well be excused the rights of hospitality!”

“Ha!” cried Padilla, a livid tinge colouring his dark features, “am I betrayed?”

“Your fears betray you,” replied Fernando. “Guilt will render ruffians cowards!”

“What do you aim at by such an epithet?” cried he, stamping with fury upon the ground. “Am I betrayed by my own people, betrayed into the hands of a desperado, an adventurer! Here, help! help!”

At these words he drew, and made a push at Fernando.

Virginia fainted away. Elmira uttered a loud scream, and caught the left arm of her father, while I ran to separate the combatants, who eyed each other with inveterate fury.

The servants, who had heard their master's cries, rushed into the room; but, being unarmed, I held them at bay with the point of my sword, while Padilla, almost choaked with madness, commanded them to seize Fernando.

"This is an extreme foolish business on all parts," cried I. "Don Padilla, you must allow this is a shameful outrage upon persons of our quality; and you, Fernando Coello, govern your resentment."

"Is this Fernando Coello?" said Padilla, sullenly.

"Yes," replied I, "it is your nephew, the son of your sister Isabella; surely you will not treat him thus on a first visit? Servants, you may retire."



Don Padilla did not contradict my order; he sat down in gloomy silence, and my friend, sheathing his sword, placed himself in a chair, playing with the hilt, without noticing the situation of the ladies. Virginia yet remained upon the floor, and her sister hung over her, uttering the most piercing cries.

Agatha, the ladies' attendant, entered with some essence and water, and I flew to assist in recovering Virginia. Don Padilla

eyed my attention without speaking ; he seemed revolving in his mind matters of greater moment, now looking at Fernando and then upon me.

When Virginia recovered, he ordered his daughters to retire ; and then, in a tone of greater complacency, inquired my name and quality ; and how I had met with the accident in the forest, which he had slightly heard from the servants.

I replied, that I was the Marquis Albert de Denia ; that my mother was sister to his first wife, Lady Elmira.

The colour rose in his face at this remark ; but, biting his lips, he remained silent.

I had every reason to believe, that the assassin Jacques had held some correspondence with Padilla ; in which case, to appear too ignorant, was as dangerous as knowing too much. I therefore observed, that having been benighted in the wood, I had clambered a tree to sleep, when I was suddenly awakened by the sound of voices beneath me. “ I insist upon it,” said one, “ he shall not live—(Don Padilla started)—are we to take pay for nothing : I scorn it, Lopez.” (“ Did they say this ?” said Padilla, impatiently.) I took no notice of this question, but went on.

“ I am of your opinion, Jacques,” replied the other, who I suppose was called Lopez ; “ I will not eat my bread in idleness—Don Padilla—(he at mention of his name turned pale, but remained silent—Don Padilla shall certainly die !”—“ Here,” said Jacques, “ shall it be here on this spot : many a man sets out on a journey he never returns from.”—(Padilla trembled, and looked round the room).—“ No, not here,” replied Lopez, “ in the hole further on, where the trees hang over the water. You remember that place, Jacques ?”—(Don Padilla started up, and clapped his hand upon his sword, while his eyes flashed with fury ; again he sat down, and I continued.)—

“ At these words I lost my patience, and leaping down upon them, sword in hand, one of them was slain ; and the other, taking advantage of my fall, stabbed me in the arm. Your daughters saved me from death in the morning ; and I now return thanks to you for the protection of your castle.”

Padilla muttered a very ungracious welcome. His mind was disturbed by the account I had given him, which involved in suspicion the designs of the ruffians ; a suspicion that was in some degree confirmed by their then being in the kingdom, when he had supposed them, according to their own account, slaves in Turkey.

After a time spent in musing, he suddenly demanded if I had seen or could recollect the faces of these men ? I replied in the negative ; the darkness being so great, that I had difficulty to distinguish their persons.

He did not appear displeased with this reply ; though he swore vehemently he would have the scoundrel sought for and hanged upon the nearest tree, "Had you killed them both, Marquis," said he, "you would have made me eternally your friend."

"Thus it is," thought I ; "the tools of our vengeance or ambition are a terror to ourselves. No doubt he trembles for the consequence of that ingratitude, he himself has exemplified."

"I suppose," said he, after a gloomy silence of half an hour, "you do not intend remaining in this part of the country many days after you are so well recovered ? I understood at Tolosa, the troops were under marching orders."

I perfectly comprehended this hint, and I answered—"The death of my father has a more urgent claim upon my presence at Madrid ; and possibly the new dignities I shall thereby receive, will prevent the necessity of my longer leading a life of so much hazard."

"Then you were a soldier of necessity ?" replied he, without any regard to delicacy. "You say right, it is a hazardous profession."

I had some difficulty to qualify my reply. "It is as you say," answered I, "But the necessity I laboured under was the calls of honour, and the claims of my country. These are powerful arguments, Don Padilla."

"Yes," cried Fernando, raising his head from the deep study he had fallen into ; "but they are not arguments every man can feel."

He darted a look at Padilla, who perfectly understood him, but made no reply ; and to turn the discourse, which I feared would again kindle into wrath, I praised the situation of the castle, and the beauty of the scenery. He listened like a man who does not attend.

"You do not seem satisfied with its situation," said Fernando. "For my own part I think I have seen a castle on the banks of the Darro that was much more romantic, more suitable to reflection. You understand me—"

"I do," replied Padilla, rising ; "but you do not understand me."

He was quitting the room abruptly, when suddenly recollecting himself, he returned to apologize to me ; observing, that he had many orders to give, and some necessary arrangements to make after his absence.

As soon as we were alone, Fernando gave way to a transport of rage ; insisting that we should, without sleeping again in the castle, return to Tolosa.

"Moderate, if you please, this frenzy of yours," said I, "Con-

sider the variety of interests we have to arrange in the service of which, passion will be only detrimental. Don Padilla is a man of power. He possesses a large revenue from his acquired American fortune, which is increased by the acquisition of this extensive domain, and rendered immense by the addition of the estate in the province of Grenada; his income is equal to a prince, and think you it will be an easy matter to bring a criminal like him (supposing him such) to justice. We must bury in our breasts every suspicion, till time and opportunity shall bring forward the hour of retribution. Reflect also, that my heart is engaged to Virginia, and you will then remember that Padilla is her father."

"Well, well," replied he, "all this I have been turning in my mind; but remember also, that I am under the most sacred engagements—engagements that I cannot break. Remember also, that this castle contains a secret, which, if told, may overwhelm all the power of Padilla in a moment."

"Do not bring before me that horrid recollection," said I, "The images of that chamber haunt my imagination; and this night I resolve to discover if all my suggestions are true, or whether the obscurity and terror of the moment had deceived my sight."

"I will attend you," returned Fernando: "this is a business in which we are both deeply engaged—no common affair must turn us to another purpose. Padilla will know that we have slept in different chambers, and it may raise his suspicion if we should vary that custom; mine is not far from yours, and I will be with you a few minutes before twelve."

I had scarcely time to agree to this proposal, when Gonzalez entered the room under pretence of clearing away the fruit. "I was afraid, Senors," said he, "how it would be—my heart misgave me when the ladies asked for the key. I could not account for it; but I have strange forebodings at times."

"Nothing new has happened I hope?" said I.

"Yes," replied he, "his Excellenza has found out that you were all in the picture gallery, the curtain being left up. He has been in a terrible passion, and so scolded the young ladies, that they are crying their eyes out, poor souls! I have come in for my share; but I am old and tough, used to many a storm that blows over me."

"A savage!" exclaimed Fernando; "he is—"

"Hush! Senor, pray do not let any body hear you. I am much mistaken if there be not some spy in the family. You remember the strange voice we heard that night? If I am betrayed Senors, I know what will be the consequence."

"Comfort yourself, Gonzalez," said I: "hear, and say nothing

to anybody, and time may bring about strange events. We must soon leave the castle, possibly to-morrow; be a guard over the ladies, and if any violence, from whatever motive, should be offered them or you, instantly dispatch a courier to my palace at Madrid, and we will bring a troop of cavalry, and pull this old building down about his ears."

Gonzalez smiled at this expression; and fearing to be missed, hastened away. I was very much pleased that a correspondence had thus been established. It was needless to clear up to him the knowledge we had of the person who had occasioned the interruption; as it would only subject him to a thousand fears, and perhaps cause him to leave the castle.

We saw little more of Don Padilla that night; he was, or pretended to be, absorbed in business: neither did the ladies appear, which made us suspect they were under a command to keep their chambers. I retired early to my own, where I prepared every thing for our undertaking; putting my pistols in order, and providing my lamp. Some arrangements for my intended journey the ensuing day kept me employed: for I was determined no longer to delay my absence from Madrid, where my presence was so necessary.

The solemn hour of midnight arrived, and Fernando appeared very well armed; so that we had no occasion to fear an encounter with Jacques, even should he be supported by Padilla. We trimmed our lamp, and, to prevent accidents from the sudden closing of a door, or the current of air, Fernando lighted a taper.

I gently drew back the canvass painting, which rolled into a nich, and entering the opening, closed it behind us. We proceeded silently and cautiously till we arrived at the gothic hall, where the unfinished feast remained.

I was about to draw the curtains behind the chair of state, when I fancied that I could distinguish the hollow sounds of a passing footstep. We paused for a few moments, and all again became silent.

I feared that our lights might betray us: for though we did not apprehend much of personal danger, we knew not how to excuse to Don Padilla the unwarrantable freedom we were taking, and which in our own eyes appeared wanting of honour. The motive, however, was strange, and out of the ordinary occurrences of life: common means of proceeding were abortive resources; and the necessity laid upon us became, in our eyes, sufficient excuse.

I drew the curtain with caution, and looking round, all appeared dark and vacant. We ventured forward, treading light as midnight robbers—the echoing hall catching and returning the smallest sound.

Our lights reflected our persons in lengthened shadows on the wall : and that fear superstition inspires, irresistibly touched our minds, as we recollected the several incidents that had occurred to ourselves.

We descended the staircase, down which I had fallen, and passed on till we came to the door of those chambers where I had been so shocked with human depravity. The key was no longer in the lock ; a plain indication that some person had been there since myself ; and an assurance that my senses had not wholly deceived me. We endeavoured to enter by force ; but the strong door resisted all the efforts we were capable of making, without endangering ourselves by the noise. We paused to consider whether we should return to find other means of entrance.

A faint ray of light darted across the farther end of the passage, discovering to us a distant and narrow flight of stairs, leading to a range of apartments, of which we had no knowledge.

“ This flaring light will betray us,” said I. “ If you will remain here with the lamp and taper, I will venture to ascend those stairs, and see whence that light shines.”

Fernando would not readily agree to this proposal : he wished us to leave our lights burning upon the pavement, while we should go together. But I represented the danger of our making too much noise ; and the double service he would perform in coming to my assistance by surprise, if assistance should be necessary, as my assailants would not be prepared for his attack.

Having prevailed on him to agree to my proposal, I walked cautiously forward ascending the back stairs. The light shone steady on the landing, then suddenly disappeared ; as if the door of the chamber from whence it shone had been closed. I ventured forward, listening at every step I took. About twenty paces forward, my ear caught the low sound of voices, but so indistinct, that I could make out no one sentence.

I paused, and in a few moments a door on the right hand was partly opened, a stream of light shone full into the gallery, and some person looked out, as if to see no intruder was near. He retired without closing the door, and I advanced, scarce daring to breathe. I ventured so near, that I could distinguish the voice of Padilla, and the harsh tones of some other, who spoke so low, I had difficulty to understand him.

“ All this that you tell me is true ?” said Padilla.

“ True, your Excellenza.”

“ And you heard that old dotard amusing them with all the lies that are circulated by the superstitious fools about him ?”

“ Yes, your Excellenza. He mentioned the strange entrance of Count Ferendez on your wedding night ; upon which they

made their comments. I am certain the Marquis overheard more than was sufficient when he was roosting in the tree."

"And for which your tongues deserve to be cut out," said Padilla: "we must consult about him—he must pay for his curiosity!"

"Aye, aye, by the Holy Peter!" said the ruffian, whom I had no doubt was Jacques; "if I take him in hand, he will have tight work of it—'tis what I owe him for the murder of my friend. He was very curious in his inquiries about the ladies."

"Do you say so?" cried Padilla. "Do you think he has any suspicion?"

"'Tis as certain as death," replied Jacques, "he has more than suspicion. I should have done his business that night had I found him snug."

I shuddered at the narrow escape I had had; and not without a sense of the danger I ran, from having raised upon me so inveterate an enemy. He went on—

"Invite them to remain with you some days. They will not enter into your motive. There are many ways to dispose of a guest!"

"By my troth are there!" said Padilla, in a raised voice, "you have hit it Jacques—these sparks are not to be played with. Fernando is a fiery-headed fellow, and has a claim from his ancestors, never yet settled, to these very estates."

"I know it," replied Jacques; "I have thought on that. We will settle his claim, however, with more certainty than law."

Don Padilla broke into a laugh. It was the laugh of malignant triumph: and, had I at that moment possessed the power, it is probable I should have made no scruple of arresting their intentions.

"Let us now go," said Padilla: "have you the key? We must perform the necessary duty."

I inquired within myself what this duty could be. Had it relation to the things I had seen in the moon-light chamber; or, were there yet deeper or more horrible secrets in the gloomy walls of this antique building. "Why not be witness to this duty?" thought I. "If it relates to that chamber, they must pass these stairs—I shall have time to reach Fernando, and we will take our stations together."

I retreated gently down the stairs, and passing quickly along the passage, was surprised to find Fernando absent. The lamp remained burning on the pavement, but the taper was gone. "Surely," said I to myself, "this is very imprudent—what succour could he have given me in case of necessity? But what motive could have led him from his post? it must have been

momentous. He did not pass me I am certain ; and surely cannot be returned to my chamber."

I waited with the greatest impatience and apprehension, expecting that Padilla and Jacques would every moment appear upon the opposite stairs, and find me exposed before them, in a place where their crime would run no danger of detection. I durst not venture to call, and my imagination began to picture some unexpected tragedy.

The old bell of the castle sounded the solemn hour of one. Its vibration seemed lengthened in my ear ; where it had not ceased trembling, when a bright light darted from a door on the left hand at a distance, and gave me to expect the return of Fernando.

I advanced a few paces to meet him, wondering what could have induced him to enter that passage in my absence ; but my wonder was changed into astonishment, on beholding a phenomenon singular and unaccountable. The light, whose rays had broke upon the long and obscure passage, moved forward without visible conductor, in the form of an ignis fatuus, or marshy meteor ; it moved within a foot of the pavement, with a slow and even motion, and its light was fixed and clear, without wavering on the breath of the wind.

I stood at a distance, watching this ominous appearance, and expecting what might ensue—nor did I many moments expect in vain.

A tall figure, wrapped in a long cloak, and muffled round the head, walked solemnly into the passage. The arms were crossed upon the breast, and but a faint outline beneath the drapery, marked its connection with the human form.

I shuddered as this phantom drew near ; as it perfectly brought to my mind the black figure I had beheld in my dream, within a few yards of the very spot where I then stood. Its size was equal to that of Padilla, and I should have supposed it himself in disguise, had it not been for the supernatural flame which moved forward before. I wanted courage to speak or to move, waiting with terror for the event.

He moved forward, in a musing posture, until he came within a few yards of where I stood, then solemnly raising the hood of the cloak which enveloped his head, and throwing wide his right arm, I beheld beneath, the dress of a soldier stained with blood.

I started at the sight. I doubted not but I saw before me the perturbed spirit of Count Ferendez, and my knees trembled beneath me. His countenance was pale and bloodless—his eye was wild, yet without lustre—and death seemed stamped upon his yellow forehead. His lips were without motion ; and, as he

slowly passed me, he pointed to the door from which I had seen him enter.

Once, and but once, I had seen this dreadful vision of disturbed immortality, on the eventful night which had announced the death of my father. The indistinct view that I then had, imprinted for ever on my memory the terror of features not to be forgotten; and it was not until the phantom had ascended the great stairs, that I found courage to remove from the place where I stood.

I could not doubt but the motion it had made to the farther door, concerned my friend; whom I now judged to have seen the same appearance in my absence, and followed it into some danger. I had reason to believe, from what I had seen in the moonlit chamber, that Don Padilla and Jacques, were not the only inhabitants of this dreary wing: and I shuddered with apprehension, as I hastened to find my friend.



The door which I entered opened into a winding passage, which was arched with masonry, very different from any part of the castle I had hitherto seen. I began to fear, from its solidity that it led into the dungeons and vaults which ran beneath the whole building.

My apprehensions were in part allayed, when I entered, by

three descending steps and a narrow door, which, from the rust of its fastenings, seemed to have been closed for many years; into a chapel, evidently long in disuse.

I waved my lamp in the air, to guide me through the deep gloom which seemed impenetrable; a cold and sacred stillness seemed to reside in the place, and to fasten on my mind with a reverential awe.

Tall shadows seemed to move along the walls, as my lamp waved in the air. I called in a low voice, the name of Fernando; but no sound, except faint echoes, returned reply.

I began to be extremely alarmed on his account; not being able to conjecture what misfortune could have befallen him.

I paused, and looked round me with a reverence I cannot describe, and which we seldom feel. The ornaments of carved work were covered with dust and cobwebs. The crucifix and the lamps were broken. Trophies of ancient military exploits, waved their torn fragments in the air. I approached the altar, on which a small crucifix yet remained, mildewed with damp. I lowered my lamp to look at the workmanship of the altar, and perceived on one side, an iron door, which opened into the wall, standing open, and I had no doubt led into the family sepulchre.

"Doubtless," thought I, "my dear Fernando has followed that terrible phantom into this place, and his fright has overcome him, surrounded by so many fearful objects.

I confess I did not feel any satisfaction in the thought of descending into this dark and frightful abyss, but the claims of friendship suppressed this repugnance; and holding my lamp so as it was least liable to be extinguished, I ventured down the steps, which were loose and shook beneath my weight. The lamp which I held in my hand, scarce served to render darkness visible; and I saw, with fear, that the flame became every moment dimmer, till it twinkled like a star and expired, leaving me in the profoundest darkness.

I called aloud on Fernando, but received no answer: the hollow vaults extending and reverberating my voice to a distance, which left me to conjecture.

I stretched out my hands, and found them resisted on one side by a pile of coffins, which shook at the touch. I shuddered as if I had grasped a serpent, and turned round with the intention to hasten from a place where the air was so damp, I had scarce power to respire, and where heaps of dead were extended in terrible array.

In my haste I stumbled against something on the floor, and fell down. I reached out my hand after the first surprise, and felt a human body on the ground before me. The blood ran

cold to my heart. My fingers traced over the face, it seemed warm beneath the touch, and the truth flashed upon my comprehension.

"It is Fernando," cried I aloud, and scarce knowing what I said, "he is dying and no help is near!" The pang which I felt at that moment, I cannot attempt to describe—it was a start of despair; and, forgetful of danger to myself, I dragged the body up the steps, which were clammy with subterranean dew, and happily gained the chapel.

I tore open his clothes, and putting my hand upon his heart, a slight pulsation was perceptible. I raised the body on my shoulders, and being too much agitated to regard trifling incidents, I ran through the apartments, notwithstanding the impenetrable darkness. The air in the great hall was strong, and placing him upon one of the chairs, I chafed his temples and breast till he began to breathe freely, and by slow degrees recovered. His recollection, however, was extremely confused; and he cried frequently, "Oh! the horrid vision—take me away, my dear Albert—save me! save me!"

I was myself almost distracted at this raving; not doubting but his senses were disturbed by what he had seen, and I conducted him with the utmost difficulty back to my chamber; where I forced him to drink one of the cordials the physician had prescribed to me, and then laying him upon the bed, I sat by him, thinking over the many unaccountable incidents which had occurred to us both within so very few months.

It appeared to me like a dream. "Who else amongst mankind," thought I, "are involved in so singular an adventure?—in a business so complicated, so mysterious, and so dreadful, that I am at times tempted to doubt my own existence: or to believe all the dreams of idleness and romantic superstition.

Undoubtedly, murder is the most atrocious offence man can commit against man; for which neither he, nor all united society can make retribution to the injured. It is treason against the order and harmony of nature. Without the intervention of supernatural witnesses, no crime has been discovered by ways so unforeseen and so singular.

It was the belief of the ancients, that the wandering spirits of persons slain by violence, whether private or in battle, roamed about the earth until their ashes received burial; and that belief has descended, and remains to this day amongst the lower classes of mankind. And why may it not be so? Are we more wise than the ancients? Or, are we only more daring?"

CHAPTER VIII.

Credulity, the child of Ignorance,
Nurtur'd by Idleness, best loves to dwell
In rustic shades, or in the gloomy pile.

WHILE I sat beside my friend, wrapped in these gloomy musings, the morning dawned across the mountains, light and airy clouds spread over the horizon ; here streaked with gold, and there dappled with silver. In the east, the ethereal blue of the heavens enlivened the landscape, and the dark mountains of Morena seemed for once to smile.

I arose from watching over my friend, who had fallen into a gentle slumber, and opening the casement inhaled the fresh air of the morning, which revived my spirits, and seemed to breathe upon me in new life.

The beauty of the garden beneath me, gay with a profusion of variegated flowers, invited me to partake of its sweets before the blazing sun should have exhaled them, or withered the clear green of the foliage.

No person was yet visible in this large pile of building, and fastening the sliding picture with a knife, I stole softly along the galleries, and descended towards the garden. The door of a little room on the ground floor stood open, and some person within sighed heavily.

“ Who,” thought I, “ can have occasion to indulge this early grief? Have those in humble stations troubles like us to prey upon them, and blight their little felicities? Very possibly this is some love-stricken maiden indulging the reveries of future prospects, and sighing forth the name of some fortunate youth.”

These passing reflections occasioned my return after going by a few paces, and curiosity prompted me to enter. I was greatly surprised to see Virginia already up and sitting alone, so lost in the subject of her reflections, that I made several steps before she turned her eyes to me.

She started, blushing at my intrusion, and in her confusion was at a loss to speak.

“ My dear cousin,” said I faltering, for I had caught her diffidence ; “ how fortunate is this ! It is a chance beyond my hopes.

This day, Virginia, will most probably part us many leagues, and when shall I see you again?"

"That I do not know," replied she, turning her eyes towards the ground. "But why should you ever wish to see me more?"

"Can you ask me so cold, so cruel a question?" said I, taking her hand. "Can you be ignorant, that while you administered to my illness, you inspired a pain that is incurable, but by yourself. Tell me then, dearest Virginia, whether I may hope you can return my affection?"

She blushed, hesitated, half raised her eyes beaming with meaning, then answered with the prettiest confusion in the world—"I know not, Marquis, whether discretion justifies me—I am ignorant of the ways of the world, and have only to speak with the sincerity of a country maid. I have heard, that in polished circles they never mean what they say."

"But I, Virginia, I have been little used to those circles; the camp has been my school, and the thunder of war my rattle. We have no time in camps to study the art of trifling with the affections of the fair; and believe me, lady, you yourself cannot speak with less disguise. Speak then, Virginia; let me listen with delight to the accents of peace."

I endeavoured to sooth her embarrassment. I pressed her to declare that she was not indifferent; and an affirmative which died away upon her trembling lips, elevated my feelings to rapture.

After allowing a few short minutes to these endearing confessions, which constitute so much of the pleasure of genuine love, and evaporate in detail, I remembered with regret the necessity there was for my sudden departure from the castle, and adverting to the return of Don Padilla, "Is it not surprising," said I, "that he should treat with such *hauteur* persons who have some claims to civility? Can you guess any motive, Virginia, for this strange disposition? Is it the malady of the mind, or arises it from external causes?"

"I," replied she, "cannot give any reason for it. There was a time; I am told, when he was all vivacity—too much so indeed; but that was before he went to Peru. His good fortune made him more exalted in his carriage: but from the death of my mother (which happened before I can remember), arose that severity of manners, which glooms over his own enjoyments. He is always, I think, worse after his visits to Grenada; and my sister and I have generally to seclude ourselves from his presence for some days, till his temper becomes more settled."

"And does no suspicion ever cross your mind?"

"Holy Virgin! what suspicion should?"

“Nay, I know not; but surely there must be some secret—some unusual cause for this behaviour. Who, or what does he visit at Grenada? Have you relations there?”

“You ask very strange questions,” said Virginia.

“Because,” replied I “I have strange suspicions. Your mother died suddenly—do not start, Virginia, but hear me.—Her waiting-maid, Teresa, has never been heard of since the night of the funeral—”

Here I suddenly remembered the images of that horrible chamber, and of what my eyes had witnessed, and I started up involuntarily. A moment was sufficient for recollection—I sat down and continued.

“The Lady Zidana, what became of her? How, or when did she die?”

“Did you never hear?” said Virginia, turning very pale, perhaps at the disorder of my features. “I remember old Gonzalez told us one day, she was drowned in a boat upon the river Darro, by the boatmen being in liquor. But what has all this to do with your sudden departure?”

“Would to heaven,” cried I, “that it had not to do! Ah! Virginia, I fear—”

“Fear what?” said she, trembling. “You terrify me with apprehension—what is it you fear?”

“I fear that all is not right. Why is the eastern wing of the castle never visited?”

“O” said she, smiling, “if that is the reason of your suspicions, I can easily do them away. That side of the castle is haunted. Have you not noticed that large painting of the black and the white knights? Did you understand it?”

“Yes,” replied I, “I *did* understand it—it has a very important meaning. Are you then acquainted with the secret?”

“I know no particular secret in it,” returned she. “It is well known that wing of the castle is haunted by these knights. They were two brothers, who, in former times fell in love with the lady of the castle, who was their only sister. She lived alone with them after the death of their parents; her name was Seraphino, and she was renowned as the greatest beauty in the provinces. Every knight who sought her hand was obliged to tilt with one or other of the brothers, who constantly remained victorious, and their uncourteous behaviour drove all visitants from the castle.

“The brothers having no strange knights to dispute with became jealous of each other, both endeavouring to influence Seraphino with their criminal passion, and being of fiery spirits they agreed to bring their pretensions to issue by single combat.

They mounted their horses in the court yard, obliging their sister to witness this unnatural dispute. The white knight was wounded, but he unhorsed the black one. Both were enraged to a pitch of frenzy, and dragging their sister into the great gothic hall in the eastern wing they there proceeded to finish the combat by the sword. Seraphino endeavoured to part them, but in vain. They fought with the fury of lions ; and were not content till they had received so many wounds that they fell upon the floor in the agonies of death. Seraphino was overwhelmed with grief and despair at the sight, and stabbing herself with a poinard, fell and died upon the bodies of her brothers.

“Ever since that time the east wing has been haunted. The noise of the knights fighting is heard at particular times ; and upon the same night on which the event first took place the spirits of the knights and the lady act over the same tragedy—the marks of which are visible at this day, the forms of their bodies where they fell being printed on the floor in blood.

“This is the most tragical of tragedies, Virginia,” said I. “Who gave you all this wonderful information ? Have you seen or heard any part of it yourself?”

“I have certainly heard very strange noises,” she replied. “I have heard groans at times which sunk my heart within me. But why should you doubt the truth of this story?”

“Because, my dear cousin,” said I, “there are many circumstances very improbable in it. It is not more than twenty years since that side of the building was deserted. Your mother, Elmira, resided there, and if it had been subject to these martial visitants I fancy she would soon have changed her situation.”

Virginia had attended these objections with impatience. “Nothing is more easily answered,” said she, with an air of superior argument. “My father when he came to live at this place, on his return from Peru, found the castle shut up ; and treating the whole story as a jest, he had that very suit of rooms fitted up for his own residence, the better to inspire the servants with courage. He was however never very content in his situation ; and the servants have told me, they were certain from his change of disposition he had seen the unnatural brothers in their nocturnal rencounter.”

“He still persisted in living there, when my mother died. Who knows if she were not frightened to death ? I’m sure the sight of three dead people cutting each other in pieces would kill me. When I first saw you wounded in the wood and the dead robber beside you I thought of the two knights.”

“Nothing could be more natural,” replied I. “But ’tis very strange none of the servants should ever meet these Cavaliers ;

and how should your father suddenly abandon that side of the castle? If he could live in harmony with them three or four years how came they to fall out at length?"

"You laugh, Marquis, but I assure you it is a very serious affair. On the wedding night of my father with Lady Zidana, he had this hall cleared, and illuminated in the most splendid manner. All the guests were seated, and the revelry begun, when the knight in black, wrapped in a long cloak, the colour of his armour, entered the hall. The clock struck one—and all the frightened guests started up in terror, flying away in the greatest confusion. When all the visitors had made their escape different ways, and none but Lady Zidana fainting on the floor, and Don Padilla remained, he took courage to inquire the reason of this unexpected visit; inviting the ghost, at the same time, to sit down to the feast.

"The black knight frowned at this familiar invitation; and, opening his long cloak, shewed his armour broken, and his body covered with wound. "Fly," cried he, in a voice like the crashing of spears: "this hall is mine!—My brother will be here anon, to partake with our sister in the feast. This east wing of the castle is ours; and whoever henceforth resides in it, must enter the combat with us." So saying, he threw his gauntlet on the ground; and looking sternly at my father, pointed with one hand to the challenge, and the other to the door. My father willingly left such a guest in possession of the feast, which I am told, remains on the table to this very day; and taking his new-married bride in his arms, hurried away from the gothic hall."

I could not but admire this mixture of truth and falsehood: and the plausible turn Padilla had given to an interruption, witnessed by so numerous an assembly, that to have denied the fact, would be to have pronounced himself guilty.

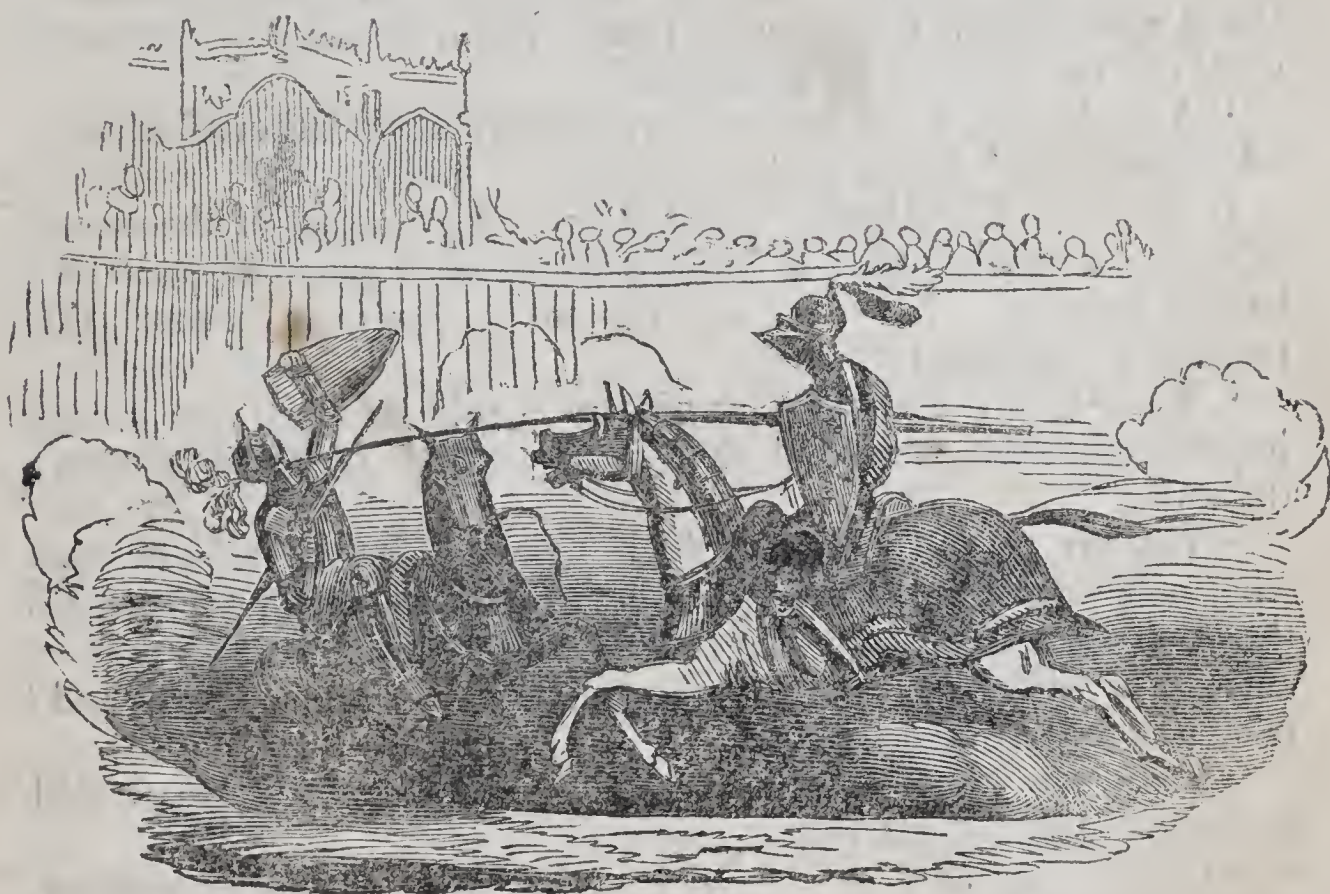
Credulity is ever ready to believe without criticism; and no tale can be too improbable for ignorant auditors. I had been warned by Gonzalez of the ridiculous reports circulated by the servants, which he never took the trouble to contradict; and I was grieved to see that Virginia had paid them so much attention. Nothing indeed could be more natural in their secluded situation, where a tale of the marvellous had charms unknown in the busy scenes of life; and where superstition held its sway without controul.

"Virginia," said I, at the conclusion of her story, "I have some reasons to wish you not to place too much confidence in the strange reports of domestics. They are generally unacquainted with facts; and from vague information, or half-heard sentences conjure up a story that will set reason at defiance. Let us now,

brought back to their fancy the pleasures of their native fields, and forgot the fatigues of their journey in the remembrance of past felicity.

What a contrast did their vivacity form against the joyless scene around us. It exhibited that trait of the human character which can feel pleasure in the midst of danger, and happiness in regions of unproductive barrenness.

Having wearied themselves with singing and dancing they laid down on the hard rock to enjoy the refreshment of sleep, while my fancy dwelt upon Virginia, and complicated plans of futurity.



“Undoubtedly,” thought I, “the lower ranks of life are not half so much exposed to vexations as those of greater refinement. What lofty cares interrupt the slumbers of these muleteers, on the tops of the mountains of Morena? while I, to whom they look up with envy, feel myself infinitely more unhappy. Whence arises this distinction? Are our joys and sorrows nearly poised? Or, does a cultivated mind bring forth imaginary evils?”

In reflections like these I passed the time till the hour arrived for our journeying onwards. The guides and Raolo were quickly ready, and we bade adieu, with some regret, to our rude shelter—the sun yet blazing with splendour.

We wound amongst the rugged roads of the mountains: now climbing by a narrow path, now proceeding down a dangerous steep; then edging the brink of a precipice, where the smallest slip would have been fatal; or traversing with caution the narrow and gloomy defile, where every hollow might conceal a band of ruffians, and fancy might almost see them start upon the trembling traveller.

Towards evening the wind freshened, blowing cold over the tops of the mountains, whose bare sides afforded no foliage to shelter off the blast. Heavy clouds rose over the horizon, adding to the darkness and dreariness of coming night. I inquired how far we had to go before we arrived at the next inn?

"No less than four leagues," replied one of the muleteers; "and these clouds drive on so heavy, that I'm feared, Senor, we shall not reach there by night fall."

"And do you know no nearer shelter, no goatherds' hovels, where we could find a night's lodging?" said I.

"No, your Excellenza," replied he. "This part of the mountains is so barren, that a kidling of a year's growth could not browse upon it. We have nothing to do, but put forward, and trust to St. Michael."

"That is an excellent sentiment," said I. "If we always hope for the best, and defy the worst, we shall overcome many a difficulty."

"You are perfectly right, Senor," replied Raolo. "The man who feels every danger which may happen, is never ready when they do. A soldier, your Excellenza, should brave every weather, and every difficulty. He should be above fortune, if he would not have fortune use him ill."

"I approve your courage, Raolo; but suppose now we should be attacked by some troop of robbers?"

"O, for the love of Christ!" cried one of the muleteers, don't suppose any such thing, your Excellenza; "what would become of us? I never had any relish for fighting in my life; and just now I think less than ever."

"There are very strange stories it must be owned," said another. "I have sometimes listened till my hair bristled up an end. There, Senor, there is a cross, stuck upon the edge of that rock. Some traveller has been murdered there."

Each of the muleteers crossed themselves, repeating their *Ave Maria*.

"Do you know the story?" inquired I; willing to amuse the time with conversation: for I felt the gloom that was deepening around us affect my spirits, which had never regained their tone, since my adventure in the forest.

"It has been there," said Pedro, "ever since I can first remember. In former times it used to be almost impossible to travel over the mountains; and in some places the crosses stand so thick, you would think they were planted to grow there."

"You are very familiar with sacred things," said his companion; "for my part my blood runs cold when I see them; especially since I heard the story which old Jacintha told me one night at Tolosa."

"What story was that?" said Jerome. "I never heard it, and I have heard many strange things."

"If his Excellenza will give me leave," said the muleteer, "I will tell you now. It is not very long, and you will find it very entertaining."

"How can that be, honest friend?" said I.

"It may very well be," replied he, bowing; "but it begins to rain, and we shall be soon drenched to the skin."

I inquired if they knew of no shelter, such as we found at noon.

"No," replied Pedro. "I would not for the universe descend into those glens; they look, by this light, like so many unfathomable pits. I should think I was going down into the bottomless gulph."

"You make a strange comparison," said I. "If you all prefer a wet skin to braving the dangers of these unknown cavities, put on; and let us have the story Martin was going to entertain us with."

The evening was so dark, that we began to lose the distinct view of immediate objects; and surely no prospect could be so totally cheerless. The rain spread a mist about us, and rendered the roads dangerous; while we feared to move from a direct line in search of shelter, lest we should plunge down some precipice, or wholly lose the road. The muleteers could not dissemble their fears: and I had to urge Martin several times for his story, well knowing that talking banishes fear. After several loud hems, Martin began, his companions riding close, that they might attend his tale.

"A traveller, who was mounted on a sorry ass, had to journey over the mountains alone without a guide, for he was very poor. He rode several days, till he came near the middle of the mountain. It was about night-fall that he arrived at the foot of a prodigious large cross, fixed up where a barbarous murder had formerly been committed.

"Beside the cross stood a mule, ready saddled and bridled, the bridle fixed to the cross; but as he drew near, he saw no owner for the mule, at which he very much wondered. He

stopped his ass to look round, but could see nobody. 'This is wonderful strange!' said he to himself; 'this mule could not have been placed here without hands; and why, above all places in the world, place it on a cross?' I should have told you, that his surprise at sight of the mule, made him forget to repeat his *Ave Maria*; a thing never to be omitted on these occasions by a good Christian.

"Well, there he stood considering what the mule should do in such a place without a master. 'Tis a thousand pities,' thought he, 'so fine an animal should be so exposed to the weather. He will be starved—some brute of a man will come by and take him away. Why then may not I exchange him for my worn out ass, who is more used to hardship than this sleek looking beast.'

"Having settled this point of humanity with his conscience, he dismounted, and taking off the bridle, hung that of his ass in the place. He then mounted, overjoyed at the exchange and admiring the adventure; but he no sooner touched the back of the mule, than away it galloped, scouring along the road, as if he would break the neck of his rider.

"The traveller endeavoured in vain to check him by the bridle; he rode the more furiously, leaping prodigious chasms, and tearing down the most frightful precipices. The poor fellow would not have given a pin for his neck; and his bones were shaken in his skin like a sack of cucumbers. But now we come to the most tragical part of the story."

"Well," said Raolo, with a laugh, "let us have it by all means; what became of the traveller?"

"You shall hear," replied Martin. "The mule continued to drive on at a most prodigious pace till he was all in a violent foam, passing along the narrowest roads within an inch of the edge; sometimes tearing up hill, and then flying down, till the traveller was almost dead with fatigue and fright."

"Prithee, get him a little faster to the end of his journey," said I.

"Please your Excellenza," replied Martin, he went as fast as he could; and it is impossible to finish the story before he ends his career.

"Well, he rode onwards, without being stopped or interrupted by any thing on the way; nor did he meet with any living creature in this long course. He pulled hard at the reins to check the mule, but he still continued to ride on as he did at first: and what was more strange his swiftness seemed even to increase."

"O, intolerable!" exclaimed I. "If he galloped as fast as thy tongue, and to as little purpose, I fancy he never reached the end of his journey."

“Yes, Senor,” continued Martin, in a serious tone, “he galloped at a terrible rate, till he all on a sudden stood still, in a narrow savage-looking hollow, where some thorns formed a cover over head, and concealed even the twinkling of a star. The traveller did not at all like the looks of this spot. He began to spur and kick the beast to make him go on, but it was all in vain—he stood stock still. He beat him over the head with his whip, but the mule only hung his ears; he began to coax him, but he only wagged his tail, and would not stir one step.”

“I’m afraid,” said I, “we are pretty much in the same situation: tell us, however, how long he stood in that position?”

“I can’t say exactly how long, Senor, but there he stood; nor would all the traveller could devise make him stir one step. He dismounted and tugged at the bridle; the mule put his fore-feet to the ground, and stood firm. He went behind, and endeavoured to shove him forward; but he might as well have attempted to push down one of the mountains. He began to think that his feet might be fixed in some trap, and he lifted them one by one, but the mule would not stir.”

“And there your tale remains,” said I, “like the traveller’s mule.”

“No, no,” replied he, “I am not at the end of it yet. The traveller in amazement mounted again, and the mule began to neigh so loud, that all the cliffs rechoed the sound, and he thought himself surrounded by a thousand others. The ground on which he stood began gradually to move—”

“Bravo! bravo! honest Martin,” cried I, “this is a promising story truly.—So, as the mule would not go, the ground was obliged to undertake the journey!”

“You are pleased to be merry, Senor; but I can assure you this is no joke. The ground, as I said, began to move, and to sink downwards, till the traveller in affright found himself up to the stirrup. In a moment after it was up to his breast; and before he could raise his hands to cross himself, he found himself in a cavern: where three fierce robbers, with whiskers from ear to ear, and rapiers that trailed upon the ground, seized him at once by the collar.

“Ha! dog of a wretch!” cried they, in voices of thunder, “you would have stolen the mule, and the mule has stolen you. You will be a dead man in a minute; but first tell us what you have got about you.”

“For the sake of St. Dominique,” said the traveller, “spare my life. You will get nothing by killing me, gentlemen, I have not a *maravidie* about me. All my wealth was upon the back of my poor ass, doubloons and dollars. I had not the time to remove

them on to the back of that devil of a beast, before he rode away with me. If you will only give me time, I will go and fetch it."

"No, no," replied the thieves, "we are not so easily done as that comes to, we will fetch it ourselves: in the meanwhile we shall keep you safe enough." With that they dragged the poor trembling wretch into a long chamber of the cave, where he felt nothing beneath his feet but skulls and dry bones of travellers who had been trepanned in the same way, and his heart sunk within him.

"When he supposed the thieves at a distance, he began to think how useless it was for him to spend his time in studying over death's heads when he was no hermit; and taking up a strong thigh-bone, he made use of it to force the door of his dungeon.

"An excellent repast of meat and wine stood upon a table; and being willing to have another meal before he should be starved to death, he fell to. The wine made him merry; and, seeing a dress belonging to one of the robbers, he stripped off his own, being naturally fond of exchanges.

"He admired the fierceness of his figure, armed with pistols and a long Toledo, and began to lose all apprehensions of the thieves. He considered, however, that it might be as well to leave them to themselves when they should return; and, as doubtless the mule who so well knew the way in, must know the way out; he loaded him with some bags of hard coin, that the weight might cool his courage, and mounting him, began to drub him.

"The mule, no doubt, thinking by the dress of his rider, that he had one of his masters to deal with, immediately struck into a long dark passage, where the traveller was obliged to lay upon his breast along the animal's neck, to prevent his own being broken. A glimpse of light at last appeared, and he found himself in a deep hollow surrounded by rocks, from which the mule had a difficulty to extricate himself."

"I would not run so many dangers for all the money he got by it," said Pedro.

"What became of the traveller's ass, Martin?" said Raolo.

"Aye, truly, I had forgot, my honest cousin. There is a very long story goes about that same ass; he had a very droll name, and that was Raolo."

We all laughed at the fellow's humour, which had prevented our thinking too much of our situation, being completely drenched with rain. It continued to pour down, while the wind pelted us unmercifully, and almost took the mules from their feet.

We had still a considerable distance to ride before we came to the inn; and then the cheerless prospect presented, of no accommodation, a general rule all over Spain.

“This is bitter weather, indeed,” said Pedro, “the poor beasts will be jaded to death, and what a fine day we had of it. Diablo! if I don’t think the inn has run away like the traveller’s mule.”

After this observation, we dropt into a profound silence, till fear getting the better of Pedro, he first began to whistle, and then to sing with all his strength, as if to *out-noise* the storm, and deafen himself to its roaring. Martin and Jerome frequently ejaculated Diablo! or crossed themselves as the gusts of wind caused them to bend over the necks of their mules. Raolo and myself rode on in silence; till Raolo ventured to observe, that we had not been so nearly drowned for many a day; nor undergone so much fatigue since the storming of fort Oran.

“What a charming prospect,” said Raolo, “we should now have of a storm on this heap of mountains, were it not that which ever way we look, it is equally dark; not so much to be seen as an old stump, stretching out its arms, like a giant, to devour travellers by night.

“It is now infinitely more sublime,” said I. “Now you may fancy any thing you please, and dress up the waste in your own style. I wish, however, this inn was a little nearer. It is the only addition I have any desire at present to see made to the prospect.”

“I should not wonder if we passed it in the dark,” said Raolo: “we keep in the middle of the road to prevent breaking our necks down the steep, and we shall chance to ride all night.”

“*O beatissimo nuestro Senora!*” vociferated Pedro several times. “’Tis there! ’tis there!”

“What is there?” demanded I.

“The inn! the inn!” cried he. “*O beatissimo nuestra Senora!* we shall now sleep in a sound skin, and hear the storm singing about us all the while!”

“You are run mad,” said Raolo. “I see no inn, nor any signs of it—where about does it stand?”

“There, there,” cried he, “right before us. Don’t you see that little light sparkling through the windows? Aye, there we shall have a comfortable fire, and some of the best aqua vitæ in all Spain.”

I now discerned the faint glimmer of a lamp, which promised no very cheerful welcome: but any shelter being preferable to the pelting storm, we quickened our mules, and soon found ourselves at the door.

The muleteers called aloud on Master Polo, the Host; but Polo did not choose to hear anything but the storm, and all their efforts were useless. Martin dismounted, and thundered with

the handle of his whip against the door, but nobody returned any answer.

"They are all dead for certain" said he, "or deserve to be, for treating us in this scurvy way." Then discharging a stone at the door, as if he intended to break it open, he called aloud upon the Host. "If this is the treatment I am to meet with," cried he, "I shall change my bait, and never call as I cross the mountains."

"If you never stop here," said I, "where will you put up? for we have not seen any thing like a house since morning."

"Why that's true," replied Martin: "but when a man is drowned, and hungry, and dry, and cold, he never stops to choose his words."

"Nor must he choose his inn upon these wilds," said Raolo.

"This is a selfish fellow truly" said I: "he knows civility is a useless ingredient where there is no choice. If he will not stir for our sake, let us try what he will do for his own. We must use a stratagem of war—call out fire, lustily, my boys."

The expedient had the desired effect.—Polo opened the window in a hurry, to know what was the matter, and where the fire might be; but seeing all safe, he was retiring, muttering oaths at our disturbing his rest.

"Look'e, Master Polo," cried Martin, "by all the holy Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists and Martyrs! if you don't come down and open the door, I will set fire to your hovel, that we may dry ourselves as we stand!"

This brought Polo again to the window, demanding who we were, and what we wanted at that late hour.

"Come down quickly and open the door," cried Raolo, "or you will have occasion to repent it the longest day you live. Are the king's officers to stand begging at the door of a paltry inn, while a fellow like you is dozing in a warm bed?"

Polo now made haste to open the door, terrified at the sound of the king's officers, and we entered a little miserable place, with a mud floor almost in a puddle. At the farther end was an open fire place, without one spark to warm this wretched place.

Raolo seized some faggots, and I helped him to place them on the stove. A large fire was quickly made, and some rancid bacon and oil prepared by a little meagre figure of a woman, the picture of poverty and ill nature. She was only half dressed, in her hurry to attend us, when she knew the respectability of the guests; and her brown skin peeped forth here and there in no very tempting manner.

Hunger gave us appetite to the homely dish she provided;

THE
BRIDAL OF BORTHWICK.

A SCOTTISH TALE.

By D. M. MOIR.

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Dear, leave thy home, and come with me,
That scorn the world for love of thee;
Thou shalt have wool, thou shalt have silk,
Thou shalt have honey, wine and milk;
Thou shalt have all, for all is due,
Where thoughts are free and love is true.—EARL OF PEMBROKE.

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THE BRIDAL OF BORTHWICK.

A TALE.

CHAPTER I.

“ Dear, leave thy home, and come with me,
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EARL OF PEMBROKE.

LADY JEMIMA DE BORTHWICK was not more remarkable for her bearing than for her strong passions. Descended from a long line of high progenitors, she had perhaps allowed overmuch the consciousness of her nobility to hold in abeyance the milder and more feminine graces of her nature. This aristocratic disposition, let it, however, in charity be acknowledged, was never allowed to display itself in tyrannous orders or actions, but left itself to be inferred from her haughty reserve, the splendour of her usual attire, and her strict attention to preserve her children from vulgar contamination.

Had fortune established them somewhat lower in the scale of society, this secluding system of their parent might perhaps have cost them more than it was their lot to feel ; for the lawns and gardens around the fine castle of Borthwick afforded them sufficient scope for air and exercise.

At the time of our little narrative, Lord de Borthwick was abroad at the court of France, at the head of an embassy from Holyrood ; and his lady kept herself almost shut up within the walls of the castle, one of the most splendid and redoubtable structures of the kind in all Scotland, whether considered as a place of residence or defence ; though the value of a home, in those troubled times, was estimated less by its comfort than its security. Human foresight, however, is frail ; for, notwithstanding its being almost surrounded by a rivulet named the Gore, denying access, save by a perron of stone raised to the height of the first story, and thence communicating by a drawbridge with the gate of the tower, it did not prevent the very simple accident which is the basis of the following little tale.

Not only was the old family-nurse prohibited from carrying the children beyond the grounds in the immediate neighbourhood of the castle, but they were never, on any account, permitted to go out without her attendance. It chanced, however, that the orchard-gate had been one day left open, and while the nurse, seated in the shade of a large cherry-tree, was amusing Margery, the eldest daughter, with some verses of an old song, as she plied her needle-work, Lilian, the younger of the two, in her frolicsome chase of a butterfly, made her way out at it. The day was fine, and all the air musical with birds. The nurse sang, and the young lady listened ; but when Lilian was missed and called for—Lilian was nowhere to be found.

Conscious of her lady's impetuous temper, and terrified for the consequences of her own indiscretion, the old nurse lost the only chance of regaining her strayed charge, by making the affair known, and calling in the domestics to her assistance. Two hours were suffered to elapse in fruitless search ; the gardens—the shrubberies—the parks—nay, even the apartments of the castle itself had all to no purpose been gone through, ere, approaching the focus

of their dismay, Margery at length burst from the side of the old woman, and running with tears in her eyes to the chamber of her mother, told her that Lilian was nowhere to be found.

The abruptness of the disclosure threw the unfortunate lady, as might have been anticipated, into a severe swoon, from which she was not for a considerable time, and with some difficulty, recovered. Then, indeed, did a commotion commence, worthy of traditional record; for the alarm-bells were set a jingling so sincerely in earnest, that they were answered from the towers of Crichton Castle on the one hand, and Oxenford on the other. The steeds were hurried from their stalls, and twenty serving-men were in a few minutes mounted, and scouring the country in every direction; the bugles of one party responding to the bugles of another, and thus keeping up a chain of observation and intelligence. Every half hour a message was sent up to the warden, to learn if any one was seen returning from among the hills with happy tidings: but noon matured into afternoon, and afternoon waned into evening; in purple and gold the sun was descending behind the summits of the western Pentlands, and the bat was already abroad, flapping his leathern wings, ere, one after another, dropped in jaded steed and man, without having gained trace or intelligence of the lost child.

This was a grievous calamity for the house of Borthwick; and they judge harshly of its lady, who suppose that under the dazzling and proud exterior, dwelt none of the natural affections peculiar to a mother. The opposite may be asseverated to have been the fact, for the distraction of her mind amounted almost to insanity; the regards which she had been accustomed to withhold from the great mass of society, finding their almost only outlet in maternal tenderness. Day after day passed over, and day after day search was repeated in vain. Rewards were offered, but no one ever came forward to claim them; and when Lord de Borthwick returned from abroad, he found his fair little Lilian vanished, no one knew where, and his lady, with the whole household, in mourning.

Year after year came to pass away, and Lilian de Borthwick was as one who had never been, except in the unsatisfied recollection of her parents. It was concluded, either that she had wandered into the woods, and losing herself in their recesses, perished of hunger, or had fallen into some of the streams in attempting to find her way back to the castle. It was long afterwards discovered, however, the truth of the story ran in neither of these channels.

CHAPTER II.

THOUGH the time when the gipsies, or wandering Egyptians, first appeared in Scotland, be not exactly ascertained, the earliest authenticated notice of them hitherto met with, is in a letter of James the Fourth, to the King of Denmark, soliciting the extension of his royal uncle's munificence to a party of them, who were travelling back to their native country on the banks of the Nile.

At the period of our narrative they had multiplied to a considerable extent, and overrun in an especial manner the districts in the south-east of Scotland: having at Kirkyetholm, in Roxburghshire—a village embosomed among the Cheviot hills—a kind of general rendezvous. This place the vagrant tribe considered as their head-quarters, and, better to bring a people who acknowledged no claims of birthright or citizenship within the pale of justice, the Lords in Council had granted particular powers to the head of their clan, under the style of Lord and Earl of Little Egypt. Nor were the wandering community without their especial utility, at a time, and in a country, where regular merchants were not to be met with, save in the towns and cities, for though notoriously given to petty plunder, and consequently under a particular public surveillance, they atoned for this in some measure by acting as tinkers, and carrying about articles of crockery, selling gewgaws and finery to the swain, wherewith to woo and win the affections of his rustic Dulcinea; or, peradventure, making to many the present time happy, by prophesying lustily of future happiness.

Now, however little it might have been suspected by the noble family of Borthwick at the time, a female of this tribe, and none other, was the kidnapper of fair little Lilian. Having been perambulating the country in quest of customers for her small wares, she chanced to be resting on a large stone under a chesnut-tree by the way side, when the child, only three years old, came tottering out, in her glee, from the gate of the orchard. Such a prize had

never before awakened the pilfering propensities of the gipsy woman, the child being wrapt up in a scarlet mantle, lined with costly furs, and profusely covered with gold embroidery. As it were a bird drawn by fascination into the jaws of the snake, the heedless child made directly towards the spot where the woman sate. No one seemed to follow; and, gazing with a quick heedful glance around, she perceived that no one was near; so, thoughtless of consequences, and without having time to reflect, further than that a prize was in her power if she chose to take advantage of her good fortune, she snatched up the little creature in her arms, enveloped her in her ample duffle cloak, and away as fast as she could fly with her burden to the nearest covert of the forest.

No doubt aware that the child was a scion of the proud tree of Borthwick, and that its abstraction might draw down not only destruction on her own head, but involve the destinies of her whole tribe, it is scarcely to be supposed that the gipsy had any other object in view than to possess herself of the splendid mantle thrown around the child. So, after hurrying on for some little distance into the woods, yet not farther than that Lilian, if brought to the margin, might regain her way home, she endeavoured to undo the clasps which fastened the mantle; but, after repeated trials, found her efforts unavailing. It was only now that darker purposes flashed athwart the mind of the Egyptian; and, taking out a large knife from her pocket, she threatened instantly to imbrue her hands in the blood of the poor child if she did not promise to remain quiet. She tried and tried in vain, for numerous clasps were secured in a way she knew not to unrivet; and her eastern nature enkindling to a degree of rage, while muttering some dark mysterious curses, she almost resolved on taking away the life of the innocent,—for the fastenings could not be cut asunder, without materially deteriorating the value of her prize. But, even in the darkest and most malignant heart, there are some nooks accessible to the touches of nature—some kindly speck in the blasted wilderness of the human bosom, with its singing bird, and its spring, and its palm tree:—so when Lilian cast up her bright blue eye, craving the mercy and compassion of the savage, the hard knots of her swarthy brow relaxed; the scintillations of her dark flashing eyes abated; and, threatening the child on the peril of its life to make any outcry, she snatched her again up into her arms, and pursued her way to the hills, through the by-paths of the forest.

CHAPTER III.

THE summer sun was now high in heaven, and the gipsy was far on the road towards Kelso, though she kept carefully aloof from public observation, by threading many “a bosky bourne, and busky dell;” now making directly to some mountainous point among the Lammer-muir hills, and now winding circuitously around the far-scattered farm-steadings. Often, from the top of rising grounds, did she stop to listen, and to look back in the direction of Borthwick Castle; but neither sight nor sound conveyed to her a token of alarm or pursuit. Weary and worn out with her burden, and her hurried journey, she came to a rivulet which gurgled pleasantly under some ash trees, and here, seeing no trace of human habitation nearer than a village some two miles distant, she laid down Lilian on the grass, that she might wash and refresh herself.

Fatigue, terror, and anxiety, had so overcome the gentle child, that in a little she fell into a sound sleep, from which she did not awaken as the Egyptian conveyed her to the screen of a blueberry-bush; for the sun was fierce and scorching, and there was not a cloud on the face of the blue sky. Scarcely had she done this, when her ear was suddenly alarmed by the trampling of horses, and climbing a little way up one of the trees, she perceived a party ascending the nearest brae. What could she do? To alarm the child was now too late; for in awaking it suddenly, it was most likely that a sense of its situation might cause it to scream, and bring the horsemen directly upon her;—to escape from the copse was impossible;—and she immediately found that she had nothing for it but to provide for her own safety, by creeping into a large hole in a sand bank, half hidden by the tangled branches of the sloe and bramble.

Scarcely had she got securely into her hiding place, when the riders approached. It was, however, none of the scouring parties of Lady de Borthwick, but the lady abbess of Coldinghame, who had been across the Frith of Forth, conducting some sacerdotal business at

Dunfermline, and was now on her homeward route, attended by three of the lay-brothers of the convent. Engaged in conversation, they had almost passed the copse, when the last of the train, beholding the scarlet tinge of the child's mantle under one of the bushes, reined up his horse, made a signal for the party to halt, and, dismounting, found little Lilian fast asleep. As no one was to be seen around, the abbess commanded the child to be carried forward along with them, promising that it should be carefully attended to, until such traces might be discovered as might lead to its restoration.

Scotland was, at that remote period, divided into a great many almost distinct compartments, from the pernicious prevalence of the feudal system—a system which rendered proximity of lordship an almost certain plea for discord and disturbance, hostile aggression, and hostile retaliation. On these accounts, there was little commerce or connection between the baronies of Borthwick and Consland, and those lying farther south; the districts skirting the sea having a more natural communication with the populous coast of Fifeshire; while the border counties formed a link of union among themselves to make incursions into the northern parts of England, or resist the predatory attacks of the powerful families of Scroope, Howard, and Percy.

Whatever might have been the cause—and probably this was the true one—the asylum of Lilian never was discovered; and she was suffered to grow up in the seclusion of the cloister, like a violet in the shade. All the knowledge and learning of the times were, however, duly propounded to her; for the abbess, to her credit be it spoken, took a pride in her young charge, who, when she had attained to her fifteenth year, was a perfect model of feminine beauty. To her external loveliness she added the endearing additions of a spirit the most affable and benign, a heart overflowing with feelings of sympathy, and a sensibility to the charms of external nature, illustrative of all that is excellent and generous. She looked on all living things as if she derived pleasure from the sight; and, by the charms of her temper and person, stole away the affections of all that looked on her.

About this time Sir David Seaton, a young and valiant knight, arrived from East Lothian on some matter of business, and, in his conversations with the lady abbess in the guest hall, was smitten with the loveliness of the fair foundling, who sat at work in one of the window-niches. The severe rules of the place forbade any formal introduction, and courtesy prevented his making those approaches which affection eagerly dictated to him, and Sir David departed without opportunity of exchanging a word with the beautiful stranger.

But the genius of true love is fruitful in inventions, and the business of the young knight's mission, it was soon found, could not be settled at a single interview; so, in a short time, without more leave's-asking than a beneficent glance from the bright blue eyes of Lilian, he ventured on breaking the ice of restraint between them. Circumstances paved the way for one another; subject introduced subject, and interview led to interview. Still, it may be sworn, that even the unworldly abbess herself began to suspect, that mettle more attractive than the settlement of some trifling difference concerning the feu-tenure of some church lands, led the young scion of Seaton such a frequent dance, though scarcely could she allow herself to suppose, that the heir of a powerful and ancient family could honourably fix his affections on a foundling, who had no escutcheon of nobility to boast of, save that of nature in her fair face and fame.

In this, however, she mistook; for not only had Sir David Seaton placed his affections on the lovely, homeless Lilian, but he had secretly vowed within his own soul, in the fervour of youthful passion, that none other but she should share his house and heart. But a tremendous barrier opposed itself between them—for how was he to obtain the consent of his family and relations, proud of their rich blood and high pedigree, to his union with a girl who could not reckon ancestry back the length of her own parents? The jealousy of the lady abbess, kindled but too late, had by this time denied him access to the convent; but as the old song goes, "True love will venture in, where it dare not well be seen," and had before this established a channel of communication; so Lilian was the plighted mistress of the young lord of Seaton.

CHAPTER IV.

WHILE the young knight and the fair Lilian were thus basking in the secret sunshine of their loves, it so happened that the Baron of Borthwick took up his abode at Winton house for a few days. Here he was nobly feasted and entertained by his host, who, having been left in early minority by the death of his father, had now attained to an age when he was deemed capable to take the management of his extensive estates ; and it was on this occasion that one evening, after the wine cup had circulated freely, the old lord, in recalling early times, spoke of his juvenile intimacy with the deceased Sir Hugh Seaton, and of many extraordinary rencontres which had mishapped between them. Among other things he spoke of a famous deer-chase, in which several riders and a number of horses had lost their lives, and when, after all the dogs were done up, Sir Hugh held the buck by the antlers, till he himself despatched him with the whinyard. "But, my dear young friend," said he, "there is a story that, above all, concerns you. Perhaps you may not be aware of the paction entered into, on our words of honour, that our families should be united, provided the one possessed a son, and the other a daughter?"

It may easily be supposed the effect which this disclosure had on the heart of the young knight, for never, till that moment, had he been made aware of the existence of such an agreement ; and he knew too well the character of old Lord de Borthwick, to conceive him capable of jesting on such a subject. He was completely overtaken unawares, and at a loss what to think ; for however rash he might deem his parent, for having become a party to such an unnatural agreement, yet did he hold his memory in such reverence as to reckon any act of disobedience on his own part not only unallowable, but sacrilegious. Then rose the form of fair Lilian to the eye of his mind, and he was tossed in a sea of troubles. Could he think of abandoning one so beautiful in form, and so pure in heart ; whose affections he had wooed, and won ; and who was willing to leave all, and follow his fortunes ! He wist not what to think, for well he knew that, backed by the whole host of his relations, Lord de Borthwick would call upon him to redeem the pledge, which had been sacredly given. So when, next morning, he bade farewell to the party of the old baron, at the gate facing towards his town of Ormiston, he shook him cordially by the hand, saying, "Would to heaven your discovery of yesterday had been made to me somewhat earlier, my lord ; nevertheless, I shall endeavour in all things to conduct myself as becometh a real and spotless knight ; and, as in all things I have been solicitous to follow the dictations of him who hath gone to a better world, so far as honourably in me lies, his will in this matter also shall not be forgotten."

Chafed in his mind, and depressed in spirit, finding it impossible to reconcile this contest between honour and duty that now followed, it is easier to imagine than describe the state into which the gallant young knight was thrown. A few restless days, and almost phrensied nights, passed over him, and, driven to the verge of despair, he at length determined to unbosom himself to Lilian, and abide by her decision, whatever that might be. On the one hand, he was called upon to ratify the paction of a father whom he tenderly loved in life ; whose memory he revered ; and whose wishes commanded his most implicit regard ; but to verify the old adage about "the course of true love," &c. these wishes could not be fulfilled without doing violence to his most deeply-cherished feelings, and injustice to her who had exchanged vows of mutual affection, and whose loveliness and virtue tended so greatly to enhance the magnitude of the sacrifice.

No sooner, however, was the noble-hearted Lilian made aware of what had been disclosed, than she heroically forestalled him in his application ; and, whatever the resolution might have cost her, she bore up against the threatened troubles, and suffered not her sorrows to appear. She wrote to him a long epistle, conjuring him, by the sincerity of the love he had once professed, to cherish hope no longer—to forget that such a being as herself existed, and faithfully to obey the sacred duty he owed to the memory of his beloved parent. "In me," she added, "you might have found a humble follower of your fortunes, but not such a wife as the high blood of Seaton calls for, and your merits claim. Think not of it—think not of me one

moment longer. Unless you consider my nature to be as base as my origin is obscure—unless you wish me to believe that Sir David Seaton can prefer his own selfish gratifications to the high and holy commands, ratified by the honour of a parent, and entailed on him as a sacred duty to obey, you will see me no longer, nor venture to delude mine ear, or your own heart, with vain sophisms. The die is cast. Farewell for ever! let our next meeting be in heaven. While I live, my prayers for your welfare and happiness shall duly ascend; and when I die, I shall—'tis the only earthly recompence I demand—I shall expect that you shed a single tear into my closing grave.

“For the last time, farewell, farewell! and remember this, that had you not been true to the injunctions of your father, you never could have been true to me. Should you consider my poor loss as at all a sacrifice, console yourself with the truth that filial piety demanded it. Secure from the tumults of the vain world, my days—and may they be few—will glide over in peace, and, from thoughts dedicated to heaven, the only earthly claim will be my constant prayer that Sir David Seaton and the wife of his bosom be happy and prosperous!”

Terrible was the struggle between love and duty in the bosom of our hero; and had the extremest danger that ever mortal heroism encountered, been sufficient to have given him a chance of extricating himself from his difficulty, most gladly would he have encountered the peril. But, on the one side, lay his heart and his vow; on the other side, an obligation, which his holiest feelings shamed him to regard. The dead could not arise to cancel this command; but the living had heroically left him, not only free, but had strenuously urged its fulfilment. What could he do? After allowing his heart to be almost rent asunder, he at length submitted to the solicitations of his relatives: and, may it be added, of his still too dear Lilian;—conscious of the awful sacrifice she was making for his sake, in voluntarily devoting her blooming years to a heartless nunnery; and that, in ratifying his father's paction, he was sacrificing all his chances of earthly happiness, by uniting himself to a woman he had scarcely ever beheld.

CHAPTER V.

It is a hard thing to go a-wooing against the will, and to make those lip professions which the heart has little share in. But circumstances reduced young Sir David Seaton to this dilemma; and after having formally paid due court to Margery, the elder daughter of the house of Borthwick, marriage matters were soon arranged, the bridal day appointed, and magnificent preparations made for celebrating the union of two such powerful families. Could credit be attached to traditional report, such a display of grandeur and magnificence had seldom been witnessed in this country: many of the nobility, with suitable attendants, convening together, in honour of the joyous festival, from remote quarters; lord, lady, waiting page, guard, and squire of low degree, bedizened out in all the gorgeous extravagance of the times, with gold on gown and doublet, down even to the bits of their bridle reins, and the housings of their saddles. So that, for some days anterior to the expected ceremony, arrival after arrival caused the halls of Borthwick to overflow, and added to the cheer of wine and wassail.

On the arrival of the cavalcade in attendance on the bridegroom, the whole party sat down to a grand *déjeuné*, in which, according to the fashion of the times, more substantial viands were mingled with rich wines, delicious fruits, confections, and lighter articles of fare; and remained at board till near mid-day, the appointed hour of the marriage ceremony, which was to be performed in the chapel of the castle, by the holy abbot of Seaton, who had accompanied his relative and patron.

Attended by the ladies of the party, Lady de Borthwick had previously to this retired, to observe that everything had been fittingly ordered, and to exhibit her magnificent arrangements. The admiration of all was, however, particularly elicited on surveying the decorations and furnitures of the bridal chamber. The walls were gorgeously covered with the finest arras tapestry, and the floors were carpeted with stuffs of the most superb Turkish manufacture. Censers, full of the most rare exotics, distributed their incense around; and the hangings of the couch were purple satin, looped up with tasselage of gold. In short, nothing could be added, even in fancy, to the superb magnificence of the place, which resembled more

the enchanted bower of an oriental tale, than a habitation destined to be occupied by two beings inhaling the breath of frail mortality. So the maidens and waiting women, who stood lining the passages as old Lady Jemina and her train passed along, expecting praise for this tasteful exertion of their handiwork, and, peradventure, largess from her guests, were not baffled in their expectations; but, in a few moments, a wild scream summoned the whole posse to attendance on their mistress.

And what, it will immediately be asked, caused this so sudden alarm of the old lady? It was this:—On pulling aside the silken curtains of the couch, to display an embroidered coverlet, in which her maternal pride especially delighted, she beheld, spread over it, the identical bandekine, or eastern mantle, which was around the shoulders of her little Lilian when she disappeared for ever! She could not mistake it, for its peer was scarcely to be found within the three Lothians; having been brought from Constantinople by a Jewish merchant, on order of Queen Margaret, by whom it was presented to Lady de Borthwick, as a birth-gift at the baptism of her younger daughter. Externally it was of the finest scarlet velvet, starred over with gems and gold; and, on the inside, lined with furs of the rarest.

Alarmed at this sudden and inexplicable indisposition of their hostess, the ladies crowded around her, and supported her from sinking on the floor by bearing her away to a seat.

“What is the matter, what is the matter?” eagerly inquired they all, as they hung around her, unlacing her bodice, and throwing open the casements for fresh air.

“The mantle,—the mantle!”—was all she was able to exclaim; and then fainted away.

“It was I,” said a stranger, stepping forth from the band of maidens, and putting aside the white veil in which her head and shoulders were shrouded. “Oh, heavens! what have I done. In my simple way I intended a peace-offering, and lo! I have brought anguish.” The eyes of the whole group were instantly turned upon her. Never had any one beheld a countenance more radiantly beautiful—and no one had ever seen it before.

Lilian had always known that her fate was wrapt in darkness, but she had long given up the hope that the mystery of her origin was ever to be developed. She was now, however, as one on whom a meteor light flashes at midnight; and she felt as if the moment had arrived when the riddle was likely to be solved. But let us turn a little back, and account for the unexpected appearance of the fair foundling at this time and place.

CHAPTER VI.

NATURE is above all; and, though its dictates may be stifled, they can never be eradicated, for in them we live, and move, and have our being. Lilian was doomed to acquiesce in the truth of this apothegm, when, in the solitude of the convent, she heard of the day fixed for the union of the houses of Borthwick and Seaton. In the enthusiasm of her passion she had reckoned on having nobly subdued all selfish considerations, and triumphed in the resolution which had taught her to sacrifice the chances of her own happiness at the shrine of the man she loved. Though yet but on the verge of womanhood, with a sunshining world beckoning to enjoyment, she had acquired fortitude enough to let herself be shut out from its pleasures; “but surely,” thought she to herself, “now when I know that to him I am as I had never been—that the marriage-day is fixed, and the heart and hand of Sir David Seaton devoted to another—it may be allowed me for a moment to look on the happiness I cannot share, and call a silent blessing down on the heads of the bridegroom and his bride.” When the heart is willing to be led, slender is the sophism that will convince it; and, satisfied with the purity and innocence of her motives, the seemingly stoical, but, in sad truth, disconsolate Lilian, secretly bade adieu to the walls of Coldinghame convent; and by such a bribe to the hand-maidens of Borthwick as her slender means admitted, she gained access as an assistant in the preparations for the marriage ceremony. She had arrived on the evening before; and when, on the morning of the bridal, the last finishing was given to the gorgeous chamber, she lingered for a moment behind the rest, and, dashing aside a hasty tear, spread out above the coverlet her magnificent childish mantle—’twas all on earth she had to give—and departed.

At that she now lingered for was a parting glance at the happy pair, before she shut out the world and its feelings from her for ever—when the accident happened which led to this digression.

"It was I," said Lilian, stepping modestly forward, almost trembling at the notice she had drawn upon herself, and at the turbulence of emotion she had excited without knowing how.

"And, in heaven's name, who art thou?" asked Lady de Borthwick, recovering from her swoon, as she anxiously rose from her chair, and came forward to scrutinize her features. "It must be—it must be she," she exclaimed. "I see—feel—know it all. The same bright flaxen hair, the same bright blue eyes, the straight nose, and the small mouth of the line of De Borthwick. It is—it is my own, my dear, long-lost Lilian!" and with these words, in an agony of parental tenderness, she rushed forward, and threw her arms around her neck, as she clasped her to her bosom.

The news spread like wildfire through the castle, and all were electrified to hear that, in one of the bower-maidens, Lady de Borthwick had discovered her long-lost child. It was no time for ceremonials, and there was a general rush of exultation towards the bridal chamber; nor among the last was Sir David Seaton, from whose cheek the sunshine even of a bridal-day had been scarcely sufficient to drive the clouds.

"Where is she—where is my affianced sister?" said he, as he made his way through the crowd. Lilian was at the moment standing with her back towards the entrance-door, and the tones of his voice thrilled through every nerve, making her feel as if she could have shrunk into the earth with agitation and delight; but as Sir David stepped forward to embrace her, she turned half round, lifted up her eyes, and her look indicated what could not be expressed.

Ancient romancers would have called in some mysterious operation of the laws of nature to assist the lovers on such an occasion; but if, like Niobe of old, Sir David was not actually metamorphosed into a statue, it may of a verity be declared that he looked like one. He stood absorbed in amazement—his brain whirled round, and all about him seemed but the phantasm of a perplexing dream. At length, heaving a deep sigh, and leaning his brow on his hand,—

"Ah, Lilian, Lilian," he said, "how unworthy am I of thy regard or commiseration. Thou hast rescued me from a gulph of perdition and disgrace! Had my regard to honour been as pure as thy affection has been devoted, less had been my compunction and self-abasement at this hour. As it is, for the regard I bear, and have borne to thee, I will live single, or wed none other. I have tarnished the fair name of Seaton, and will leave this land for ever!"

If the astonishment of the group had been formerly great, it was now carried to an inexplicable pitch; for not only was the acquaintance of Sir David Seaton with the fair stranger acknowledged, but his love for her also made manifest. How matters should terminate was not quite so plain.

"Not so fast," exclaimed Sir Gregory de Murray, when Sir David had made an end of speaking, "heaven orders all for the best, though man is oftentimes so froward in thwarting its purposes, and, in this matter, let us acknowledge the interposition of a particular providence. I trust the occasion will prove one of unmingled enjoyment to all; and that those who have been long united in heart shall now in hand be also united. But let us adjourn from this scene of confusion to the hall."

When all the party were arranged round Sir Gregory de Murray in the hall, he continued his address. He said, that "with all respect to the living and the dead, he could not but consider the affiancing of children yet unborn as at best unnatural, even though dictated by the best and purest motives; as, though hands might be in their power to bestow, it did not follow that they could transfer hearts along with them."

"My Lord and Lady de Borthwick," he added, turning to and addressing them, "when, after wooing the affections of your fair daughter Margery, I sued for her hand, your courteous answer informed me, that had not this obstacle stood in the way of our alliance, none other could have possibly obstructed it. Luckily it is now in our power to rectify such an unfortunate mistake. That obstacle is now to be removed. Though, woe's me, my fair cousin hath come forward to-day decked out as the bride of another, I can forgive, nay, admire this exertion of filial duty; and, if still I hold respect in the eyes of my once plighted, and still too dear, fair friend——"

"Nay, hold, more than enough, my gallant knight," said old Lord de Borthwick, "I have felt deeply, trust me, the injustice of depriving you of your lady-love, and my daughter of the

object of her choice. But the long-plighted vow—the long-plighted vow—how could I get over it? Thanks be to heaven, that has not only afforded a remedy, but that in the restoration of my long-lost child. Margery, come forth, my sweetest, and acknowledge if you are dissatisfied with the change?" Margery was handed forth, but a deep blush was her only answer, and not an ineloquent one.

Sir David Seaton then gallantly stepped forward, and, taking hold of her hand, placed it within that of Sir Gregory de Murray. "I have been the unfortunate, though, I assure you, unsuspecting cause of impeding a union which I pray heaven to bless. To you, Sir Gregory, I relinquish all claims—I resign the hand, and the heart, something tells me, you have already won."

The Abbot of Seaton was now summoned in to proceed with, what he had no expectations of, a double ceremonial, which he confessed seemed brought about as by an especial interposition of Providence.

"Thanks, holy father," said Sir David, "for your kind good-will." Then, turning towards Lady de Borthwick, he added, "But, my Lady de Borthwick, I fear you will reckon me cruel. You have but now recovered a long-lost child, and I would, even on the instant, deprive you of her. What says mine own injured Lilian?"

Lilian said nothing, but casting her eyes on the ground, let silence tell all that was necessary.

At the altar of the little chapel stood a double pair, and over the shoulders of Lilian her mother threw the scarlet mantle, which was destined to have exercised such remarkable powers over her fortune, saying,—

"With that scarlet mantle I lost a daughter, and now——"

Sir David Seaton concluded the sentence by adding,—

"By that same scarlet mantle I have won a bride."

THE END.

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THE
BOOK OF LIFE.

A STORY.

BY JOHN GALT.

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THE BOOK OF LIFE.

A STORY.

“ Better be with the dead;
Whom we, to gain our place, have sent to peace,
Than on the torture of the mind to lie
In restless ecstasy.” SHAKESPEARE.

THE story is in itself singular, and when you have heard how strangely the coincidences dovetail themselves together, you will not be surprised that I should hold such opinions. It was some time about Lammas, after leaving the University, I had taken a short botanical excursion among the mountains, and was returning home. Do not look so incredulous, it is no fantastical imagination of a young enthusiastic student, but a sober narrative, embracing many years.

The weather had for some time before been uncommonly wet, every brook and stream was swollen far beyond its banks, the meadows were flooded, and the river itself was increased to a raging Hellespont, insomuch, that the ferry was only practicable for an hour before and after high tide.

The day was showery and stormy, by which I was detained at the inn until late in the afternoon, so that it was dark before I reached the ferry-house, and the tide did not serve for safe crossing until midnight. I was therefore obliged to sit by the fire and wait the time, a circumstance which gave me some uneasiness, for the ferry-man was old and infirm, and Dick, his son, who usually attended the boat during the night, happened to be then absent, the day having been such, that it was not expected any travellers would seek to pass over that night.

The presence of Dick was not, however, absolutely necessary, for the boat swung from side to side by a rope anchored in the middle of the stream, and, on account of the strong current, another rope had been stretched across, by which passengers could draw themselves over without assistance; an easy task to those who had the sleight of it, but it was not so to me, who still wore my arm in a sling.

While sitting at the fire-side conversing with the ferry-man and his wife, a smart, good-looking country lad, with a recruit's cockade in his hat, came in, accompanied by a young woman far advanced in pregnancy. They were told the state of the ferry, and that, unless the recruit undertook to conduct the boat himself, they must wait the return of Dick.

They had been only that day married, and were on their way to join a detachment of the regiment in which Ralph Nocton, as the recruit was called, had that evening enlisted, the parish officers having obliged him to marry the girl. Whatever might have been their former love and intimacy, they were not many minutes in the house when he became sullen and morose towards her; nor was she more amiable towards him. He said little, but he often looked at her with an indignant eye, as she reproached him for having so rashly enlisted, to abandon her and his unborn baby, assuring him that she would never part from him while life and power lasted.

Though it could not be denied that she possessed both beauty and an attractive person, there was yet a silly vixen humour about her, ill-calculated to conciliate. I did not, therefore, wonder to hear that Nocton had married her with reluctance; I only regretted that the parish officers were so inaccessible to commiseration, and so void of conscience, as to be guilty of

rendering the poor fellow miserable for life, to avert the hazard of the child becoming a burden to the parish.

The ferry-man and his wife endeavoured to reconcile them to their lot; and the recruit, who appeared to be naturally reckless and generous, seemed willing to be appeased; but his weak companion was capricious and pettish. On one occasion, when a sudden shower beat hard against the window, she cried out with little regard to decorum, that she would go no further that night.

"You may do as you please, Mary Blake," said Nocton, "but go I must, for the detachment marches to-morrow morning. It was only to give you time to prepare to come with me that the captain consented to let me remain so late in town."

She, however, only remonstrated bitterly at his cruelty, in forcing her to travel in her condition, and in such weather. Nocton refused to listen to her, but told her somewhat doggedly, more so than was consistent with the habitual cheerful cast of his physiognomy, that "Although he had already been ruined by her, he trusted she had not the power to make him a deserter." He then went out, and remained some time alone. When he returned, his appearance was surprisingly changed; his face was of an ashy paleness; his eyes bright, febrile, and eager, and his lips quivered as he said,—“Come, Mary, I can wait no longer; the boat is ready, the river is not so wild, and the rain is over.”

In vain she protested; he was firm; and she had no option, but either to go, or to be left behind. The old ferryman accompanied them to the boat, saw them embark, and gave the recruit some instructions how to manage the ropes, as it was still rather early in the tide. On returning into the house, he remarked facetiously to his wife,

"I can never see why young men should be always blamed, and all pity reserved for the damsels."

At this moment a rattling shower of rain and hail burst like a platoon of small shot on the window, and a flash of vivid lightning was followed by one of the most tremendous peals of thunder I have ever heard.

"Hark!" cried the old woman, starting, "was not that a shriek?"

We listened, but the cry was not repeated; we rushed to the door, but no other sound was heard but the raging of the river, and the roar of the sea-waves breaking on the bar.

Dick soon after came home, and the boat having swung back to her station, I embarked with him and reached the opposite inn, where I soon went to bed. Scarcely had I laid my head on the pillow, when a sudden inexplicable terror fell upon me; I shook with an unknown horror; I was, as it were, conscious that some invisible being was hovering beside me, and could hardly muster fortitude enough to refrain from rousing the house. At last I fell asleep; it was perturbed and unsound; strange dreams and vague fears scared me awake, and in them were dreadful images of a soldier murdering a female, and open graves, and gibbet-irons swinging in the wind. My remembrance has no parallel to such another night.

In the morning the cloud on my spirit was gone, and I rose at my accustomed hour, and cheerily resumed my journey. It was a bright morning, all things were glittering and fresh in the rising sun, the recruit and his damsel were entirely forgotten, and I thought no more of them.

But when the night returned next year, I was seized with an unaccountable dejection; it weighed me down; I tried to shake it off, but was unable; the mind was diseased, and could no more by resolution shake off its discomfort, than the body by activity can expel a fever. I retired to my bed greatly depressed, but nevertheless I fell asleep. At midnight, however, I was summoned to awake by a hideous and indefinable terror; it was the same vague consciousness of some invisible visitor being near that I had once before experienced, as I have described, and I again recollected Nocton and Mary Blake; in the same instant I saw—for I cannot now believe that it was less than apparitional—the unhappy pair reproaching one another. As I looked, questioning the integrity of my sight, the wretched bride turned round and looked at me. How shall I express my horror, when for the ruddy beauty which she once possessed, I beheld the charnel visage of a skull. I started up and cried aloud with such alarming vehemence, that the whole inmates of the house, with lights in their hands, were instantly in the room—shame would not let me tell what I had seen, and, endeavouring to laugh, I accused the night-mare of the disturbance.

This happened while I was at a watering place on the west coast. I was living in a boarding-house with several strangers ; among them was a tall, pale German gentleman, of a grave, impressive physiognomy. He was the most intelligent and shrewdest observer I have ever met with, and he had to a singular degree the gift of a discerning spirit. In the morning, when we rose from the breakfast-table, he took me by the arm, and led me out upon the lawn in front of the house ; and when we were at some distance from the rest of the company, said,

“Excuse me, sir, for I must ask an impertinent question. Was it indeed the dream of the night-mare that alarmed you last night?”

“I have no objection to answer you freely ; but tell me first why you ask such a question?”

“It is but reasonable. I had a friend who was a painter ; none ever possessed an imagination which discerned better how nature in her mysteries should appear. One of his pictures was the scene of Brutus, when his evil genius summoned him to Philippi, and, strange to tell, you bear some resemblance to the painted Brutus. When, with the others, I broke into your room last night, you looked so like the Brutus in his picture, that I could have sworn you were amazed with the vision of a ghost.”

I related to him what I have now done to you.

“It is wonderful,” said he ; “what inconceivable sympathy hath linked you to the fate of these unhappy persons. There is something more in this renewed visitation than the phantasm of a dream.”

The remark smote me with an uncomfortable sensation of dread, and for a short time my flesh crawled as it were upon my bones. But the impression soon wore off, and was again entirely forgotten.

When the anniversary again returned, I was seized with the same heaviness and objectless horror of mind ; it hung upon me with bodings and auguries until I went to bed, and then, after my first sleep, I was a third time aroused by another fit of the same inscrutable panic. On this occasion, however, the vision was different. I beheld only Nocton, pale and wounded, stretched on a bed, and on the coverlet lay a pair of new epaulettes, as if just unfolded from a paper.

For seven years I was thus annually afflicted. The vision in each was different, but I saw no more of Mary Blake. On the fourth occasion, I beheld Nocton sitting in the uniform of an aid-de-camp at a table, with the customary tokens of conviviality before him ; it was only part of a scene, such as one beholds in a mirror.

On the fifth occasion, he appeared to be ascending, sword in hand, the rampart of a battery ; the sun was setting behind him, and the shadows and forms of a strange land, with the domes and pagodas of an oriental country, lay in wide extent around ; it was a picture, but far more vivid than painting can exhibit.

On the sixth time, he appeared again stretched upon a couch ; his complexion was sullen, not from wounds, but disease, and there appeared at his bed-side the figure of a general officer, with a star at his breast, with whose conversation he appeared pleased, though languid.

But on the seventh and last occasion, on which the horrors of the visions were repeated, I saw him on horseback in a field of battle ; and while I looked at him, he was struck on the face by a sabre, and the blood flowed down upon his regimentals.

Years passed on after this, during which I had none of these dismal exhibitions. My mind and memory resumed their healthful tone. I recollected, without these intervening years of oblivion, Nocton and Mary Blake occasionally, as one thinks of things past, and I told my friends of the curious periodical returns of the visitations to me as a remarkable metaphysical phenomenon. By an odd coincidence, it so happened, that my German friend was always present when I related my dreams. He, in the intervals, sometimes spoke to me of them, but my answers were vague, for my reminiscences were imperfect. It was not so with him. All I told he distinctly recorded and preserved in a book, wherein he wrote down the minutest things that I had witnessed in my visions. I do not mention his name, because he is a modest and retiring man, in bad health, and who has long sequestered himself from company. His rank, however, is so distinguished, that his name could not be stated without the hazard of exposing him to impertinent curiosity. But to proceed.

Exactly fourteen years—twice seven it was—I remember well, because for the first seven I had been haunted as I have described, and for the other seven I had been placed in my living. At the end of that period of fourteen years, my German friend paid me a visit here. He came in the forenoon, and we spent an agreeable day together, for he was a man of much recondite knowledge. I have seen none so wonderfully possessed of all sorts of occult learning.

He was an astrologer of the true kind, for in him it was not a pretence, but a science; he scorned horoscopes and fortune-tellers, with the just derision of a philosopher, but he had a beautiful conception of the reciprocal dependencies of nature. He affected not to penetrate to causes, but he spoke of effects with a luminous and religious eloquence. He described to me how the tides followed the phases of the moon; but he denied the Newtonian notion, that they were caused by the procession of the lunar changes. He explained to me, that when the sun entered Aries, and the other signs of the Zodiac, how his progression could be traced on this earth by the development of plants and flowers, and the passions, diseases, and affection of animals and man; but that the stars were more than the celestial signs of these terrestrial phenomena, he ridiculed as the conception of theory.

His learning in the curious art of alchymy was equally sublime. He laughed at the fancy of an immortal elixir, and his notion of the mythology of the philosopher's stone was the very essence and spirituality of ethics. The elixir of immortality he described to me as an allegory, which, from its component parts, emblems of talents, and virtues, only showed that perseverance, industry, good-will, and a gift from God, were the requisite ingredients necessary to attain renown. His knowledge of the philosopher's stone was still more beautiful. He referred to the writings of the Rosicrucians, whose secrets were couched in artificial symbols, to prove that the sages of that sect were not the fools whom the lesser wise of later days would represent them. The self-denial, the patience, the humility, the trusting in God, the treasuring of time by lamp and calculation, which the venerable alchymists recommended, he used to say, were the only elements which constitute the conduct of the youth that would attain to riches and honour; and these different stages which are illuminated in the alchymical volumes as descriptive of stages in the process of making the stone, were but hieroglyphical devices to explain the effects of well-applied human virtue and industry.

To me it was amazing to what clear simplicity he reduced all things, and on what a variety of subjects his bright and splendid fancy threw a fair and affecting light. All those demi-sciences—physiognomy, palmistry, scaleology, &c., even magic and witchcraft, obtained from his interpretations a philosophical credibility,

In disquisitions on these subjects we spent the anniversary. He had by them enlarged the periphery of my comprehension; he had added to my knowledge, and inspired me with a profounder respect for himself.

He was an accomplished musician, in the remotest, if I may use the expression, depths of the art. His performance on the pianoforte was simple, heavy, and seemingly the labour of an unpractised hand, but his expression was beyond all epithet, exquisite and solemn; his airs were grave, devotional, and pathetic, consisting of the simplest harmonic combinations; but they were wonderful: every note was a portion of an invocation; every melody the voice of a passion or a feeling supplied with elocution.

We had spent the day in the fields, where he illustrated his astrological opinions by appeals to plants, and leaves, and flowers, and other attributes of the season, with such delightful perspicuity, that no time can efface from the registers of my memory the substance of his discourses. In the evening, he delighted me with his miraculous music, and, as the night advanced, I was almost persuaded that he was one of those extraordinary men who are said sometimes to acquire communion with spirits and dominion over demons.

Just as we were about to sit down to our frugal supper, literally or philosophically so, as it had been served for Zeno himself, Dick, the son of the old ferryman, who by this time was some years dead, came to the door, and requested to speak with me in private. Of course I obeyed, when he informed me that he had brought across the ferry that night a gentleman officer, from a far country, who was in bad health, and whom he could not accommodate properly in the ferry-house.

"The inn," said Dick, "is too far off, for he is lame, and has an open wound in the thigh. I have therefore ventured to bring him here, sure that you will be glad to give him a bed for

the night. His servant tells me that he was esteemed the bravest officer in all the service of the Mysore of India."

It was impossible to resist this appeal. I went to the door where the gentleman was waiting, and with true-heartedness expressed how great my satisfaction would be if my house could afford him any comfort.

I took him in with me to the room where my German friend was sitting. I was much pleased with the gentleness and unaffected simplicity of his manners.

He was a handsome, middle-aged man—his person was robust and well formed—his features had been originally handsome, but they were disfigured by a scar, which had materially changed their symmetry. His conversation was not distinguished by any remarkable intelligence, but after the high intellectual excitement which I had enjoyed all day with my philosophical companion, it was agreeable and gentlemanly.

Several times during supper something came across my mind as if I had seen him before, but I could neither recollect when or where; and I observed that more than once he looked at me, as if under the influence of some research in his memory. At last I observed that his eyes were dimmed with tears, which assured me that he then recollected me. But I considered it a duty of hospitality not to inquire aught concerning him more than he was pleased to tell himself.

In the meantime my German friend, I perceived, was watching us both, but suddenly he ceased to be interested, and appeared absorbed in thought, while good manners required me to make some efforts to entertain my guest. This led to some inquiry concerning the scene of his services, and he told us that he had been many years in India.

"On this day eight years ago," said he, "I was in the battle of Borupknow, where I received the wound which has so disfigured me in the face."

At that moment I accidentally threw my eyes upon my German friend—the look which he gave me in answer caused me to shudder from head to foot, and I began to ruminate of Nocton the recruit, and Mary Blake, while my friend continued the conversation in a light, desultory manner, as it would have seemed to any stranger; but to me it was awful and oracular. He spoke to the stranger on all manner of topics, but ever and anon he brought him back, as if without design, to speak of the accidents of fortune which had befallen him on the anniversary of that day, giving it as a reason for his curious remarks, that most men observed anniversaries, time and experience having taught them to notice, that there were curious coincidences with respect to times, and places, and individuals,—things, which of themselves form part of the great demonstration of the wisdom and skill displayed in the construction, not only of the mechanical, but the moral world, showing that each was a portion of one and the same thing.

"I have been," said he to the stranger, "an observer and recorder of such things. I have my book of registration here in this house; I will fetch it from my bed-chamber, and we shall see in what other things, as far as your fortunes have been concerned, it corresponds with the accidents of your life on this anniversary."

I observed that the stranger paled a little at this proposal, and said, with an affectation of carelessness, while he was evidently disturbed, that he would see it in the morning. But the philosopher was too intent upon his purpose to forbear. I know not what came upon me, but I urged him to bring the book. This visibly disconcerted the stranger still more, and his emotion became, as it were, a motive which induced me, in a peremptory manner, to require the production of the book, for I felt that strange horror, so often experienced, returning upon me; and was constrained, by an irresistible impulse, to seek an explanation of the circumstances by which I had for so many years suffered such an eclipse of mind. The stranger seeing how intent both of us were, desisted from his wish to procrastinate the curious disclosure which my friend said he could make; but it was evident he was not at ease. Indeed, he was so much the reverse, that when the German went for his book, he again proposed to retire, and only consented to abide at my jocular entreaty, until he should learn what his future fortunes were to be, by the truth of what would be told him of the past.

My friend soon returned with the book. It was a remarkable volume, covered with velum, shut with three brazen clasps, secured by a lock of curious construction. Altogether it was a strange, antique, and necromantic-looking volume. The corner was studded with knobs

of brass, with a small mirror in the centre, round which were inscribed, in Teutonic characters, words to the effect, "I WILL SHOW THEE THYSELF." Before unlocking the clasp my friend gave the book to the stranger, explained some of the emblematic devices which adorned the cover, and particularly the words of the motto that surrounded the little mirror.

Whether it was from design, or that the symbols required it, the explanations of my friend were mystical and abstruse; and I could see that they produced an effect on the stranger, so strong that it was evident he could with difficulty maintain his self-possession. The colour entirely faded from his countenance; he became wan and cadaverous, and his hand shook violently as he returned the volume to the philosopher, who, on receiving it back, said,

"There are things in this volume which may not be revealed to every eye, yet to those who may not discover to what they relate, they will seem trivial notations."

He then applied the key to the lock, and unclosed the volume. My stranger guest began to breathe hard and audibly. The German turned over the vellum leaves, searchingly and carefully. At last he found his record and description of my last vision, which he read aloud. It was not only minute in the main circumstances in which I had seen Nocton, but it contained an account of many things, the still-life, as it is called, of the picture, which I had forgotten, and among other particulars, a picturesque account of the old general whom I saw standing at the bed-side.

"By all that's holy," cried the stranger, "it is old Crippington himself!—the queue of his hair was, as you say, always crooked, owing to a habit he had of pulling it when vexed—where could you find a description of all this?"

I was petrified; I sat motionless as a statue, but a fearful vibration thrilled through my whole frame.

My friend looked back in his book, and found the description of my sixth vision. It contained the particulars of the crises of battle, in which, as the stranger described, he had received the wound in his face. It affected him less than the other, but still the effect upon him was impressive.

The record of the fifth vision produced a more visible alarm. The description was vivid to an extreme degree,—the appearance of Nocton, sword in hand, on the rampart—the animation of the assault, and the gorgeous landscape of domes and pagodas, was limned with words as vividly as a painter could have made the scene. The stranger seemed to forget his anxiety, and was delighted with the reminiscences which the description recalled.

But when the record of the fourth vision was read, wherein Nocton was described as sitting in the regimentals of an aid-de-camp, at a convivial table, he exclaimed, as if unconscious of his words,

"It was on that night I had first the honour of dining with the general."

The inexorable philosopher proceeded, and read what I had told him of Nocton, stretched pale and wounded, on a bed, with new epaulettes spread on the coverlet, as if just unfolded from a paper. The stranger started from his seat, and cried, with a hollow and fearful voice,

"This is the book of life."

The German turned over to the second vision, which he read slowly and mournfully, especially the description of my own feelings when I beheld the charnel visage of Mary Blake. The stranger, who had risen from his seat, and was panting with horror, cried out with a shrill halloo, as it were,

"On that night, while sitting in my tent, methought her spirit came and reproached me."

I could not speak, but my German friend rose from his seat, and holding the volume in his left hand, touched it with his right, and looking sternly at the stranger, said,

"In this volume, and in your own conscience, are the evidences which prove that you are Ralph Nocton, and that on this night, twice seven years ago, you murdered Mary Blake."

The miserable stranger lost all self-command, and, staggering from the spot, fell.

THE END.

THE PAINTER.

A SICILIAN TALE.

BY JOHN GALT.

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Mine honour is my life; both grow in one;
Take honour from me, and my life is done.

SHAKSPEARE.

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THE PAINTER.

A SICILIAN TALE.

"Mine honour is my life, both grow in one ;
Take honour from me, and my life is done."
SHAKSPEARE.

ABOUT a league distant on the left side of the road which leads from Naples to Salerno, stand the ruins of a considerable villa. The gardens had been formed in terraces on the mountain behind ; the walls of them still exist, and the spacious stairs by which they were severally connected, are proofs that it had once been the abode of taste and opulence. On the higher garden a copious spring gushes out from the earth, and descends into the valley, leaping from terrace to terrace, and diffusing, as it descends, a fresh and beautiful verdure along the margin of its whole course. The peasants of the neighbourhood say, that a fountain, ornamented with statues, formerly stood where the spring now issues, and that the water was brought underground in pipes from a small lake among the hills—perhaps it still comes in that manner, but however this may be, few situations have been chosen with a happier respect for the local genius.

This once delightful mansion originally belonged to the Bellocchi family, and was the favourite residence of the last count of the race a nobleman possessed of many elegant accomplishments, and amiable qualities.

He had visited England, and was much attached to the subjects and the manners of that nation. His house was open in consequence to the English travellers, and when any of the friends he had known in London visited Bellavista, as the villa was called, no limit was set to his hospitality. He accompanied them himself to the numerous monuments of antiquity between Pœstum and the metropolis, as well as to the wonders of Vesuvius, and the relics of the exhumated cities, and he deservedly became celebrated alike for his munificence, his eloquence, and friendship.

One day a large party of gentlemen, among whom were several of his most esteemed English friends, were received by the count with his customary kindness. He had but that day returned from Sicily, where he had, a few months before, married a lady of noble birth and extraordinary beauty. His house had not yet been opened for the reception of his friends, but still he was so delighted with the strangers, that notwithstanding the want of preparation, he invited them to remain, promising, as an inducement, that although, from the condition of his own household, he could not accommodate them with beds, he would himself ride with them to a monastery on the road to Naples, and, by his influence with the friars, secure them a hospitable reception there.

It happened in the evening, that on reaching the convent several other travellers, bound for Pœstum, had sought lodgings for the night, and the count's friends could not be received as he had expected. To lighten the chagrin of disappointment, he accordingly at once resolved to accompany them to Naples, and sent back his servant Francesco to the villa, to apprize the countess of his intention, and not to expect him that night.

It was near midnight before Francesco reached the villa ; the other servants being fatigued with the day's hard labour, in bringing the luggage from the vessel which had brought them from Palermo, and with the unexpected bustle occasioned by the strangers, were all asleep when he arrived, and he was in consequence obliged to let himself in by a window

On almost any other occasion this would not have happened; for the count had in his service a Sicilian painter, Salmano, who was employed in decorating some of the chambers—a man of rare gifts, and who had a particular taste for watching the tints and shadows of the moonlight for suggestions in his profession. But he, too, being this night exhausted and weary, had foregone his nightly vigils. Nor was it a circumstance to attract notice, for he was a man advanced in life, of a pale and slender appearance, indicative of some constitutional infirmity. It was, indeed, a wonder among the domestics how one, so evidently of a feeble frame, could night after night pass so many cold and solitary hours studying the glimpses of the moon on the landscape, or the shadows of the statues in the gallery.

Before day-break old Agatha, who had been the nurse, and was the favourite attendant of the countess, was suddenly roused by her lady coming into her apartment in the wildest and most distracted manner. She was still undressed; her long hair fell in loose tresses on her shoulders. She bore a lamp in her right hand, and shook her left, and gazed as if she had come from some frightful discovery.

Agatha was awake by her entrance, but astonishment at the sight before her rendered her unable to speak, and she lay looking at the countess, who exclaimed with the voice of agony—

“I fear—I fear—yet cannot I give utterance to the horror. I blush like a guilty wretch, and yet in what of shame have I been guilty—have I but dreamt! Oh heaven! drive from me the imagination with which I am beset.”

Agatha, terrified at these exclamations, raised herself, and entreated her lady to be composed, and not to repine too much at the absence of her lord.

“He will,” said she, “be here betimes in the morning, and you must not think of this frolic in that way. I beseech you, my dear lady, to be calm. Though the count were dead, you could not be in greater affliction.”

“To me he is dead,” cried the countess, “to me he is lost—and I am lost. Call up the household,—I am not yet mad.”

With these wild words she hastened back to her apartment, and Agatha, trembling, dressed herself, and went to call the servants; but when she reached the landing-place of the great stairs, she found Francesco standing there as if he had been watching.

“How does the countess?” he inquired with a confident look, which, however, Agatha did not observe particularly at the moment, but replied—“She is wofully sad; it is very strange that she should be so sad—where is the count?”

“He is gone,” said Francesco, “on to Naples, and sent me back to tell the countess. Does she suspect?”

“How!” cried Agatha, surprised at the cunning leer of the fellow, “what should she suspect?”

“I could not inform her,” replied Francesco, confusedly, “she was asleep.”

“Asleep, Francesco! How knew you that?”

“She made no answer when I knocked at her door.”

“Knocked! did you dare disturb her?”

A momentary shudder shook the whole frame of old Agatha, and she looked with a curious suspicion at Francesco, who said, in evident embarrassment—“Why do you look at me in that manner? perhaps she did not hear?”

“She must have heard you—audacious!—but why is she in such distress?”

“Is she distressed?” replied Francesco. “Do you then think she will be angry when she sees me? The door was open, and I thought she knew my voice.”

“Dared you to enter?”

“In truth, Agatha, I did.” And, in saying these words, Francesco hastily descended the stairs, in evident terror and alarm.

Agatha remained immoveable, and, bursting into tears, exclaimed—“There is some mystery—horrible mystery. Oh! could she be—a lady so chaste, so excelling in love to her lord—”

She was interrupted by Salmano, the painter, who at this moment entered, and to whom she said briskly—“What seek you here?—this is about the time you were wont to go to bed.”

“I have risen to see the dawn,” replied the artist. “Last night I was fatigued, and early went to sleep. But go to your lady—she is very ill.”

"She only grieves that the count has, so thoughtlessly, not returned;" and she looked eagerly at Salmano.

"Has nothing else happened to her?"

"Do you then think that she has some other cause for sorrow?"

"I hope no other: but she looks as one that I should give ducats to have for my model as Lucretia, escaped from Tarquin."

"Her grief is natural. The first night in a strange land to be so deserted!"

"No, no, it comes of a deeper wound."

"Why think you so?" sighed Agatha.

"The painter's skill," replied the artist, "instructs him to discern the mind in the face I never saw her in such anguish before. It may, however, be as you say. But tell Francesco to come to me betimes. The day is beginning to dawn, and I want him in my study. The fellow has a lascivious look, with such a sober air, that he assists my fancy—as I am painting Susannah and the Elders—he is an elder."

Agatha made no answer, but with sadness in her eyes left him, and the painter went to his study; soon after Francesco, as desired, entered.

"How now!" said Salmano, "you keep me idling."

Francesco, with sullenness, replied—"I am not hired to be a Jewish priest—I have my master's business."

"He said that, when I wanted you, all your other duties should be suspended."

"But I have business in Naples."

"Does not the count return this morning?"

"How should I know?"

Salmano looked at him steadily for nearly a minute, and then said—"You have a masterly command of yourself. But, fellow, there is trouble and fear in your eye; what guilt have you committed? what have you done that your presumptuous hopes may not yet be concealed?"

"You amaze me, sir," replied Francesco with awe.

The painter laid down his easel from his thumb, and taking up his hat, said—"I am here but professionally, and am not of a prying disposition; but you have done, or I mistake much, some guilty deed, to which some wild hope is attached."

With these words he walked into the garden, and before Francesco had time to recollect himself, Agatha came into the room, saying, "I thought Salmano was here."

At these words Francesco stepped forward, and taking her by the wrist, said, in a whisper, "I do not like that painter."

"No!"

"If we were in some secret place, I could tell you something, Agatha."

"Well."

"Agatha, you are knowing, observant, and prudent; but I wish we were in some room less exposed. How did the painter look when you saw him first?"

"He deplored the grief of the countess."

"He was not stirring when I returned. Artists are men of subtile craft. When I returned last night, I went to my lady's room——"

"Daring shame—I told her so!"

"How did she look when you told her?"

"Like Paulina, in the picture there, when told that her lover was not the god Anubis."

"It may be good, Agatha, for the painter to turn on me. These men of art do other things at night than catch moonlight shadows; but be cautious;" and he suddenly left the apartment, while Agatha, in great perplexity, said aloud to herself, after thinking some time—

"My fears first fell on him; he is of that complexion, and I have seen him looking intemperately at her. Salmano, too, but not like him—here, in his study, she may be seen among his goddesses; and when he looks at her the most ardently, it is as a student pondering over his book. I should as soon expect to see him bedded with Diana; but the rank look of yon insinuating wolf makes conviction, even in my doubts."

By this time the household were all afoot, and some remarkable apprehension appeared to infect them all with distrust of each other. The painter was deeply affected; he could not resume his pencil, but walked alone in the gardens, and shunned everybody. Agatha, noticing him from the window, went to him, and said—"You were not formerly inclined to

walk in the garden. Days are not your time of study ; but you walk too much in the night. Night is the season of sleep, and none trespass on its lonely hours but those afflicted with guilt or love."

"My profession," replied the painter, "requires that I should study the varieties of light and shade."

"Cannot you, then, be content with sunshine?"

"It is my taste, Agatha; my genius prompts me to study the moonlight."

"What is that genius, signor? I hear of it, but none in the house can tell me what it is."

"It may not be easily explained," replied the artist; "but some have a keener relish of one thing more than of another of their neighbour's. Some are charmed by the ear, and some by the eye. The senses are the gates of the mind, and genius enters by the most frequented, or that which is best constructed."

Agatha paused thoughtfully; for though aged, she was shrewd and wary. She then said,—"Genius then makes men prone to find and to seize their means of enjoyment, and as you forego your rest to hunt midnight shadows, or rise in company, forgetting who may be present, and bid a fair lady bend her head aslant, as she would look from a picture—some other, by the difference of his genius, would equally, without decorum, seize on his means of pleasure."

"You are wonderfully metaphysical," said Salmano. "I did not think you were so much of a philosopher. But why are you so suddenly changed, and so earnestly?"

Agatha, without noticing his question, inquired, seriously—"How came you to be stirring this morning at two, and yet, when I met you at day-break, you said that you had but just risen?"

"I told you," replied Salmano, "the truth."

"Was ever such a robbery committed!" cried Agatha, with an accent of grief.

"Am I suspected of a theft?" replied the painter.

"O! no, it was not done by you—I could pawn myself for your integrity;" and she instantly quitted the astonished artist and fled, in tears, into the house. Soon after Francesco came into the garden; he had plainly no business there; but he sought the painter, who, on perceiving him, went straight towards him, and said, severely,

"A crime has been committed last night!"

"I know it," replied Francesco. "Do you blame me?"

"Are you afraid, mannerless dog, that I should? But, if I could persuade the world of my skill, there would not be wanting evidence to do so—the forehead mark is plain upon you."

"Shall I be ruined by your fancies?"

The painter, indignant at hearing his art so contemned, said, with greater energy,

"Lewd epieure, it is not for thee to know the scrutiny of the painter—ay, or the holy purposes to which his art may minister. The painter's peneil can teach like the poet's pen, and feelings, faithfully limned, instruct the mind, and improve the heart. Go, menial; go and be punished."

Franceseo was thunderstruck, and slunk, abashed, from his presence. Soon after the countess sent for the painter, and as he entered the house he met her confessor coming from her. He would have spoken to the priest, but the old man was in tears, and turned from him. On approaching the countess, he found her seated alone, in sublime serenity—a passion of sorrow, that could only take expression in a calm—a calm like the stillness of death.

"I pray you, Salmano, take the command of this ill-fated mansion—place sentinels at the gate, men you can trust. Let no one pass till my lord returns. See that Francesco do not escape. O, serpent! that could so invade the Eden of my wedded faith. I can no more!" and with these words, she stabbed herself, and instantly expired!

A terrific cry from Salmano brought many of the servants into the room, and among them Francesco. To him the painter solemnly said, "Her heavenly spirit is away like a poor frightened bird, appealing to the heavens against the hand that plundered its early nest. Rouse thee, thou wretch! there is no vision here!" More he would have added; but in that moment Francesco seized the dagger, and pausing, as if he hoped some one would arrest his hand, plunged it, disappointed, into his own heart.

THE END.

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